Escaping "Perpetual Beginnings"

Challenges and opportunities for local atrocity prevention in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Authors: Megan Renoir, Aji Ceesay, Emmanuel Kandate, Dimitri Kotsiras, Pacifique Makuta Mwambusa and Pascal Kaboy Mupenda

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About the authors

Lead Author: Megan Renoir - Research Manager, Peace Direct

Lead Author: Aji Ceesay - Research Assistant, Peace Direct

Emmanuel Kandate - Director, Research Initiatives for Social Development (RISD-DRC)

Dimitri Kotsiras - Research Analyst, Peace Direct

Pacifique Makuta Mwambusa PhD – Director of Research, RISD-DRC

Pascal Kaboy Mupenda - Senior Researcher, RISD-DRC

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Acronyms

ACLED   Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

ADF   Allied Democratic Forces (Forces Démocratiques Alliées)

AFDL   Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo)

AP   Atrocity prevention

CSO   Civil society organisation

DDR   Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

DRC   Democratic Republic of the Congo (République démocratique du Congo)

EWER   Early warning and early response

FARDC   Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo)

FDLR   Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda)

HRDDP   Human Rights Due Diligence Policy

IBV   Identity-based violence

ICGLR   International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

IDP   Internally displaced people

INGO   International non-governmental organisation

MONUSCO   United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo)

OCHA   Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PNC   Congolese National Police (Police Nationale Congolaise)

PoC   Protection of civilians

SSU   Stabilisation Support Unit (Unité d'Appui à la Stabilisation)

UN   United Nations

Glossary of terms

Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) a foreign armed group operating in eastern DRC created in the 1990's in Western Uganda with the aim of creating an Islamic state.

Babembe also referred to as Bembe, Wa or Wabembe, are an ethnic group who migrated from Congo-Brazzaville in the 18th century to in the province of South Kivu. The Mai Mai Yakutumba militia is primarily comprised of individuals from the Babembe ethnic group.

Bafuliro also known as the Bafulero, Bafuliiru, Fuliiru, Bafuliru and Kifuliru, are a Bantu ethnic group mainly found in the South Kivu province of DRC. Traditionally, the Bafuliro are farmers who see themselves as one of Congos "autochtone" tribes. This ethnic group makes up the Mai Mai Zabuloni and Mai Mai Bede. Nearly all Bafuliro-led armed groups in Uvira have had ties to Burundian armed factions.

Banyamulenge a Tutsi ethnic minority group in the DRC with origins from Rwanda who arrived before the colonial era, residing mainly in South Kivu. Their fight to gain land rights in order to increase political influence has led them to join various militias. These include past rebellions by armed groups such as AFDL (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire), RCD (Congolese Rally for Democracy) and CNDP (National Congress for the Defence of the People).

Banyarwanda Hutus, Tutsis and Batwa who all speak Kinyarwanda and live along the Rwandan border in Kivu province. Similar to Banyamulenge, they also have Rwandan origins.

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) one of the main foreign armed groups operating in the DRC. Although it has an increasing number of Congolese members, the group was originally formed by members of the Rwandan government and army ousted in 1994 as well as Rwandan refugees from the genocide.

Hema an ethnic group concentrated in Ituri. They have been in control of Lendu settlements since pre-colonial times. The Hema elite managed to build a strong and economically profitable business as pastoralists. This group make up the UPC militia (Union des Patriotes Congolais, Union of Congolese Patriots).

Ituri a province in eastern DRC; its capital is Bunia. It borders South Sudan and Uganda.

Lendu another ethnic group also found in Ituri, eastern DRC. Rivalry with the Hema escalated into inter-communal violence in 1998. They also formed the FNI militia (Front Nationalist et Integrationist, Front for National Integration) and FRPI (Force de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri, Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri).

Mayi Mayi or Mai Mai community/ethnicity based armed groups created to defend their local communities in DRC.

Nande also known as Banande, Kinandi, Ndande, Orundande, are a Bantu-speaking ethnic group mainly located in the Beni and Lubero territories of North Kivu province. This group of people have formed Mai Mai groups and other militias, including Mai Mai Ngilima, RCD-ML, Mai Mai Mazembe and UPLC.

North Kivu a province in eastern DRC; its capital is Goma; the city of Beni is also in North Kivu. It borders with Rwanda and Uganda.

South Kivu a province in eastern DRC; its capital is Bukavu; the city of Uvira is also in South Kivu. It borders with Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania.

1. Introduction

Armed violence has persisted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for over 30 years, but a recent uptick in both its scale and frequency led the United Nations to describe the situation as "characteristic of crimes against humanity" and "possibly even genocide".[1] Violence has been linked to the legacies of cross-border conflicts such as the 1994 Rwanda genocide, a history of large-scale internal conflicts, such as the First and Second Congo Wars (1996-2003), as well as to issues of limited state authority, including an absence of effective formal justice mechanisms, absent or inconsistent land tenure regimes, and the alignment of political and resource power along ethnic lines.[2]

To date, national government-led efforts have failed to effectively curb the violence and have intensified insecurities, largely due to the combination of low state capacity, high levels of direct state involvement in and support for the violence, and high levels of impunity for actors engaged in violence.[3]

In the absence of effective national government-led protection of civilians, the majority of atrocity prevention (and broader violence prevention) activities have tended to be carried out by local[4] and international actors, including local civil society, community[5] members, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and various international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

However, despite the vital role played by local and international atrocity prevention actors in DRC, a number of significant gaps exist that impact the effectiveness of local atrocity prevention work.[6] Local actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs) and informal community-led groups have reported that low capacity, under resourcing and an absence of networking and coordination between various actors are significant hindrances to effective work in the region. Similarly, there is very little available information regarding how local actors coordinate horizontally (across civil society), and how the actions of local actors inform or relate to national or external atrocity prevention systems.

For instance, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is mandated by the UN

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1   See OHCHR (2020) ; Reuters (2020); and Al Jazeera (2020)
2   Huggins (2010)
3   Lucey and Kotsiras (2020)
4   "Local actors" or "local atrocity prevention actors" in this report refers to civilians or civil society actors engaged in prevention activities who are from the area, country, or region affected by violence. This includes social organisations or informal actors such as community or traditional leaders and religious groups and can also include local government actors.
5   "Communities" as referred to within this report (including references to 'inter-communal') refers to both geographically located groups as well as groups aligned through identity factors such as religion or ethnicity. Community should be understood as a grouping factor rather than a static, objective descriptor.
6   "Local atrocity prevention" in this report refers to any activity undertaken in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, specifically in the provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri. Local atrocity prevention may include activities that span local areas, such as a provincial programme in Ituri comprised of multiple communities, as well as hyper-local activities that may only occur at the community level. This is distinct from "national" atrocity prevention work, but local atrocity prevention systems can include a broader range of actors beyond "local actors" as described in footnote 15. Local atrocity prevention tends to include national-level actors, the security sector, the international community such as the United Nations or various INGOs, as well as civil society and community members.

Security Council to protect civilians from violence and support the stabilisation and strengthening of state institutions, but it is unclear how coordinated these activities are with the work of local actors – in fact, MONUSCO activities have frequently been criticised for operating in isolation rather than coordinating with and facilitating the development of sustainable long-term local mechanisms.

This is particularly concerning given the expected withdrawal of MONUSCO from the DRC, announced in 2019, but which has yet to yield any clear strategy for liaising with local civil society and Government to develop a sustainable transition of responsibility and resources.[7]

This research addresses a number of gaps regarding current knowledge on atrocity prevention efforts in eastern DRC, primarily relating to:

• The status and composition of current atrocity prevention efforts in Ituri, and North and South Kivu, including key actors and means of coordination;

• What approaches to atrocity prevention are considered most effective by local, national and international actors;

• The primary challenges faced by local, national and international actors engaged in atrocity prevention work; and

• The forms of support from regional and international actors that are required to improve current atrocity prevention outcomes.

The research informing this report was conducted as a part of a three-year (2019-2022) project *"Strengthening Networks to Prevent and Respond to Violence"*, led by Peace Direct in partnership with Protection Approaches, Beni Peace Forum (BPF), Réseau des organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la paix, la réconciliation et le développement (REJA), and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

The project is funded through a UK government (previously DFID) Jo Cox Memorial Grant and aims to reduce the risk of identity-based violence and atrocities in Burundi and eastern DRC by strengthening civil society networks, supporting them to monitor and respond to violence, and providing duty bearers nationally and internationally with data and recommendations for meaningful and comprehensive preventative action against atrocities.

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7   Hansrod (2019)

1.1 Methodology

The research involved the collection of primary and secondary qualitative data between January and June of 2020. Secondary data collection included a review of previous research on identity politics, ethnic conflict and atrocity prevention in eastern DRC. A further earlier study on atrocity prevention in DRC, "Broadcasting Peace", was conducted by Peace Direct and Bureau de Soutien pour la consolidation de la paix en RDC (Peacebuilding Support Office in the DRC).[8]

Primary data for this report was collected in person by staff from Peace Direct (London, UK) and Research Initiatives for Social Development (RISD) (Bukavu, DRC), through the use of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). A broad range of atrocity prevention stakeholders[9] were purposively sampled for interviews across South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri (Table 1).

Table 1 INTERVIEWEES BY STAKEHOLDER TYPE

Stakeholder type	# of individuals per category
Local civil society	58
Community members	32
Community leaders	29
DRC Government	13
Academics	10
DRC security actors (police and military)	8
United Nations (MONUSCO)	8
INGOs	7
Foreign donors	2
Foreign Governments	2

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8   Lucey and Kotsiras (2020)

9   The researchers took specific steps to ensure gender parity through specific outreach to female staff and women's led organisations. Despite this, only 25% of interviewees identified as female. This is likely due to the dominance of men in organisational leadership positions in the country. The stakeholder types interviewed in each location also varied, largely as a result of contextual challenges facing researchers during the project. Research activities in Bunia and Uvira were particularly impacted by COVID-19, with only 16 and 12 KIIs conducted respectively compared to 22 KIIs in Beni. It is assumed that ongoing violence present in all research locations influenced the availability of actors and their responses to interview questions. The lack of availability was particularly apparent amongst Congolese government and security actors who often ended interviews without notice or referred researchers to other staff upon arrival.

The research locations of Uvira (South Kivu), Goma and Beni (North Kivu) and Bunia (Ituri) were chosen primarily due to the high levels of violence that have been reported over the past three years in each location. Most of the organisations involved in the research were headquartered in the towns of Goma, Beni, Bunia and Uvira, while the civil society actors who were interviewed work across the regions of North and South Kivu and Ituri.

Interviewees were identified through a combination of scoping well-known atrocity prevention actors; through organisations which had participated in other Peace Direct's consultations and through a purposive snowball approach in each location. DRC government and security actors, foreign government actors, external funders and MONUSCO staff were identified primarily through email requests for interviews, or via referrals from contacts of Peace Direct and RISD.

Interview transcripts were analysed jointly by RISD and Peace Direct staff. Transcripts were anonymised and coded to allow for a detailed data review using NVIVO qualitative analysis software. For the purpose of the NVIVO analysis, the 9 FGD transcripts were treated as 'single cases', bringing it to a total of 81 transcripts coded and analysed. Light statistics were conducted to illustrate the response rates of interviewees, but these do not offer a representative picture of all atrocity prevention actors.

1.2 Definitions used for the research

It is worth noting the specific definitions used in this project to guide understandings and interpretations of the results of this work. Firstly, while the concept is currently contested, this research defined **atrocity prevention** as *activities that address both acute issues of violence as well as underlying factors, including activities targeting issues of structural violence that create the potential for atrocities in 'peace time'.* This includes peace courts, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), and early warning and response (EWER) work.[10]

It is important to note that, in general, atrocity prevention activities are relatively indistinguishable from other violence prevention, conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. This lack of distinction was reflected in the activities reported by interviewees in this research, and in how local actors discussed issues of atrocity prevention. The tension between varying terminologies and the impacts this might have on atrocity prevention as a whole is touched upon in Section 5 of this report.

Atrocities[11] are understood within this research to be *"massive" and "deliberate" acts of violence, normally targeting specific groups of people with shared characteristics (identity groups), committed by state and non-state actors alike.*[12] 'Massive' does not necessarily relate to the sudden occurrence of violence against an identity group,[13] but rather the patterns and scale of violence through time.[14] A key element of

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10   Haider (2014) and Alliance for Peacebuilding (2013)
11   Within international law, the term 'atrocity' or 'atrocity crimes' refers to three legally defined forms of violence: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes . Ethnic cleansing, while not independently defined under international law, often overlaps with conceptual understandings of atrocities, including acts that amount to genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, yet tends to focus more specifically on the killing or targeting of a group of people from a geographic area. GAAMAC (2020)
12   European Union (2013)
13   It is important to note that the conceptual boundaries of 'atrocities' are unclear both within academic and policy realms. This is related to the type and scale of acts justified as atrocities, how actors should distinguish between particular scales of violence, and what actors are considered primarily responsible for atrocities.
14   The actual scale of atrocities is not currently agreed upon within academic or practice-based literature. The most common scale used for defining atrocities is cases of 1,000 or more deaths. However this number is both contested and does not reflect atrocities that do not entail death. For the purposes of this report, the scale of an atrocity is determined by the perceived impacts on society or a particular group by interviewees. (Anderton and Brauer 2019, p.7)

this is that atrocities have multiple warning signs and do not always develop quickly. Their deliberate nature necessitates a level of "preparation and premeditation" which distinguishes them from spontaneous or random violent events.[15]

Finally, the term **"identity-based violence" (IBV)** refers to "any act of violence motivated by the perpetrator's conceptualisation of their victim's group's identity, for example race,

gender, sexuality, disability, religion or political affiliation."[16] IBV may include atrocities, but the majority of cases of IBV are not examples of atrocities. Similarly, not all atrocities are examples of IBV. While IBV does not always equate to atrocities, the role of identity is a key factor in how atrocities develop based on the strategic manipulation and use of identity for group mobilisation, both for grouping victims and for the mobilisation of perpetrators.

Structure of the report

The remainder of this report provides analysis based on the findings and implications of the research.

Section 2 provides an overview of the eastern DRC context and history, including the root causes of conflict and local perceptions of these issues.

Section 3 presents the current state of atrocity prevention in eastern DRC, including a discussion of the most common atrocity prevention activities and 'what works' in atrocity prevention.

Section 4 goes into further detail about current atrocity prevention work, focussing on key challenges to the success of such work. This section is split into four sub-sections to elaborate on the necessary changes for improving atrocity prevention outcomes:
1) coordination and collaboration;
2) safety of atrocity prevention actors;
3) issues of state fragility; and
4) resourcing challenges for current work.

Section 5 provides a brief discussion of current conceptions of atrocity prevention concepts, including definitions of atrocities and identity-based violence, and how this may impact the outcomes of atrocity prevention in general. Finally, Section 6 of the report presents the conclusions of the research, as well as the detailed set of recommendations for specific target stakeholders, including international funders, local atrocity prevention actors and the DRC government.

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15   United Nations (2014)
16   Protection Approaches (2019)

2. Overview of the violence in eastern DRC

2.1 Background

The current violence in eastern DRC is largely tied to two key issues:
1) the country's problematic history of linking land, identity and power; and
2) continuing internal, regional and cross border conflict dynamics.

The historical linking of ethnic identity with resource-based and political power in eastern DRC has formed a particularly ripe foundation for the recurrence of violence.[17] Starting during Belgian colonial rule (1908-1960), colonisers enacted programmes that created unequal power relations between existing populations and increased competition over limited land. Colonisers implemented forced immigration from bordering countries into eastern DRC to provide labour for colonial economic activities, and ethnic groups that were considered particularly 'cooperative' were given political power and control over land distribution.[18] Mass immigration of Rwandan Hutu and Tutsi populations (referred to homogenously as Banyarwanda in DRC) between the years of 1928 and 1956 further increased competition over land and resources.[19]

Post-independence, in 1966, the Mobutu regime nationalised all land and formally instrumentalised land tenure as a way of securing and maintaining political allegiances.[20] Under this system, local customary leaders were given authority to allocate land access and extract rents, and peasant populations suffered mass displacement, forced eviction and significant loss of land access for small-scale agriculture.[21] Displaced populations were left in a state of severe food and resource insecurity, and access to land became increasingly aligned with the identity and political standing of power holders.[22]

Congolese citizenship was also periodically manipulated to forge political and economic support systems throughout the country.[23] For instance, in 1972, Mobutu enacted an ordinance allocating land to and confirming the citizenship of Banyarwanda[24] populations in order to solidify power bases in the eastern regions of the country.[25] In 1981, when maintaining political power required a retreat from centralisation of state authority, citizenship laws were shifted again to providing citizenship only to those who could prove residence before 1885, thus stripping Banyarwanda populations of their rights to both land and political posts and shifting power into the hands of indigenous Congolese populations.[26]

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17 Autesserre (2012); Bouvy and Lang (2012); Lumumba-Kasongo (2018)
18 Mamdani (2001); Stearns (2012a); Bouvy and Lang (2012)
19 Stearns (2012b)
20 Long (2011)
21 Ibid
22 World Bank (2019)
23 Turner (2007); Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002)
24 The Banyarwanda are "Hutus, Tutsis and Batwa who all speak Kinyarwanda and live along the Rwandan border in Kivu province, together with Hunde, Nyanga and Nande. When colonial boundaries were drawn in the late nineteenth century many Banyarwanda found themselves on the Congolese side of the Rwandan border, in Kivu province." (Minority Rights Group 2020)
25 Turner (2007)
26 Ibid

By the early 1990's, ethnic tensions (internally and regionally) and increasing pressures over land, led to significant destabilisation of the Congolese state. The 1994 Rwandan genocide resulted in some two million refugees entering DRC, including large numbers of Hutu genocidaires, from the exiled Interahamwe and Army for the Liberation of Rwanda. This sparked the initial large-scale conflict known as the First Congo War in 1996. With substantial support from Uganda, Rwanda and Angola, Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL) and local Congolese populations sought to expel Hutu groups from the territory and overthrow the Mobutu regime. By the time Kabila took power in 1997, both colonialism, Mobutu's reign and the various wars in the eastern region had lasting impacts on how the alignment of identity, land rights and power would influence conflict dynamics in the future.

In 1998 armed forces from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe fought a proxy war against Rwandan and Ugandan rebels in eastern DRC, following Uganda and Rwanda's refusal to exit after Kabila took power. Fighting in the 'Second Congo War' continued until 2003 when the conflict was formally ended through a peace agreement. However, the cumulative impacts of the 1994-2003 period resulted in the deaths of roughly six million Congolese and reinforced tensions between the various ethnic groups in eastern DRC that persist today.[27] Despite being labelled by the UN as a 'post-conflict context', violence erupted once again in 2006 in eastern DRC and the region continues to experience high levels of recurring violence.[28]

2.2 Current violence in eastern DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo currently suffers from the key defining characteristics of a fragile state, including a lack of monopoly over the legitimate use of force, low bureaucratic capacity, a lack of legitimacy and implementation of state institutions, and an extreme deficit in territorial control.[29] Overlapping, inconsistent and competing institutional frameworks for land management and justice systems persist, many of which remain tied to identity, which continues to undermine state development and violence prevention. In addition to this, growing urban development, the return of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees, significant shifts in the mining sectors, and increasing international involvement in Congolese affairs have led a continual deterioration of security in the DRC.

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Early Warning Project lists the DRC as at "consistently high risk" of mass atrocities, with a 1 in 7 chance of new mass killings taking place in 2019 or 2020.[30] Civilians are often targeted along ethnic and other identity-based lines, facing high levels of attacks, killings, kidnapping and sexual assault, amongst other significant human rights abuses.[31] Eastern DRC, and specifically the provinces of Ituri,

North Kivu and South Kivu have experienced a worrying increase in atrocities. Between July 2017 and July 2020, the region experienced an average of 40 reported cases of violence against civilians per month. This is compared to an average of 26 reported cases per month between June 2010 and June 2017, which amounts to a 54% increase in the number of cases of violence against civilians reported (Figure 1).[32]

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27   Autesserre (2009)
28   Autesserre 2012; ACLED 2020
29   Moshonas (2018); Putzel (2010); Hesselbein (2007)
30   Early Warning Project (2020)
31   ACLED (2020)
32   Data sourced from the ACLED data dashboard: https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard. These statistics are reporting on the number of violence against civilian events captured through the ACLED database, rather than the number of victims of violence. This denotes an uptick in the frequency of violence against civilians but does not reflect the scale or nature of the violence.

FIGURE 1. VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS IN ITURI, NORTH KIVU AND SOUTH KIVU BY NUMBER OF REPORTED EVENTS BETWEEN MAY 2010 – 2020 BASED ON ACLED'S "VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS" DATA (NOT INCLUDING EXPLOSION/REMOTE VIOLENCE, RIOTS, BATTLES, PROTESTS OR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS).
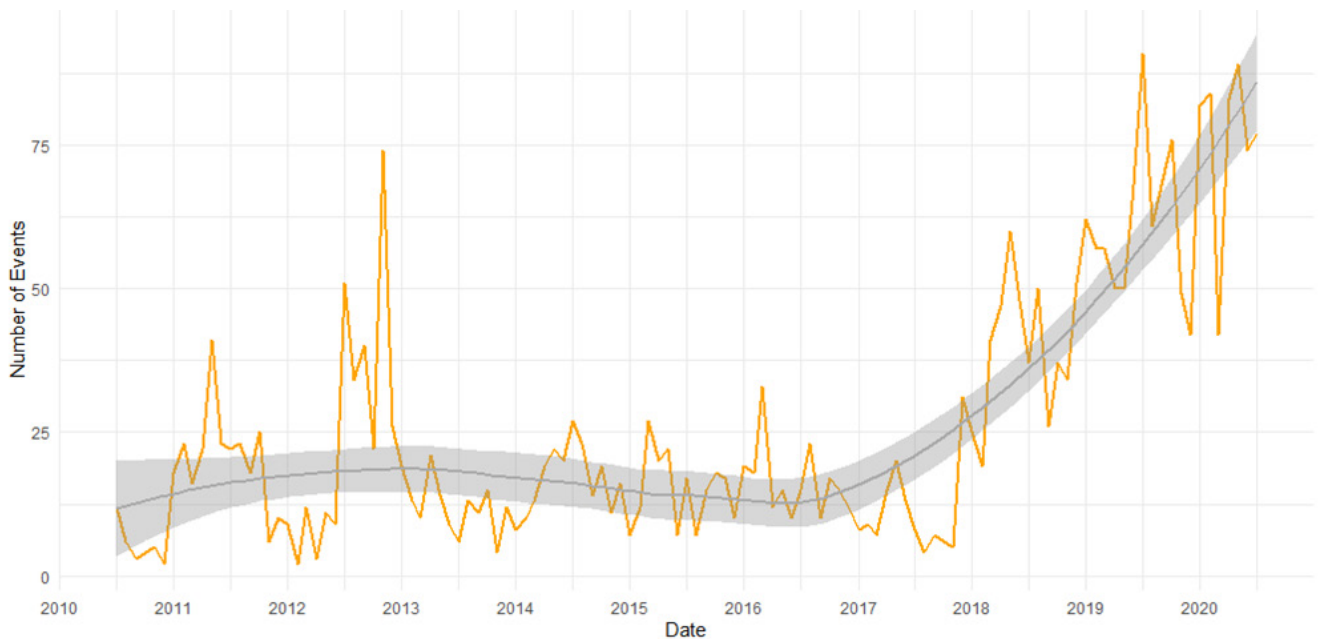
The increase in violent events has been accompanied by an increase in the scale of victims impacted by violence (Figure 2); within an 8-month period (October 2019 and June 2020), more than 1,300 civilians were killed and more than half million people were displaced across the three provinces.[33]

Most starkly, at least 531 civilians have been killed in Ituri province by armed groups,[34] the national army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC) and the national police (Police Nationale Congolaise, PNC) between October 2019 and June 2020, with 375 deaths and the displacement of over 200,000 people occurring within the month of March 2020 alone.[35] The violence has primarily been linked to ongoing tensions between the ethnic Hema and Lendu populations.

In North Kivu province, primarily in Beni Territory, over 514 civilians were killed between November 2019 and June 2020[36] as a result of fighting between the main armed group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Congolese forces.[37] The FARDC and PNC were reported to have directly killed 83 civilians and led to the displacement of over 400,000 people.[38]

In South Kivu province, approximately 74 people were killed, 36 women and children raped, and 110,000 people displaced between October 2019 and June 2020 as a result of violence between the Banyamulenge, Bafuliro, Babembe and Banyindu communities.[39] An additional 15 deaths and 13 acts of sexual violence have also been attributed to the FARDC.[40]

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33 Al Jazeera (2020)
34 Primary armed groups implicated in the attacks have been Cooperative for the Development of Congo - CODECO (primarily comprised of individuals from the Lendu ethnic group), Ndo Okebo, Nyali and the Mambisa
35 UNHCR (2020)
36 Al Jazeera (2020)
37 UNHCR (2020)
38 Al Jazeera (2020)
39 Ibid
40 Ibid

FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF CIVILIAN FATALITIES PER MONTH ACROSS ITURI, NORTH KIVU AND SOUTH KIVU DRC BETWEEN MAY 2010 – 2020 BASED ON ACLED'S "VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS" DATA (NOT INCLUDING EXPLOSION/REMOTE VIOLENCE, RIOTS, BATTLES, PROTESTS OR
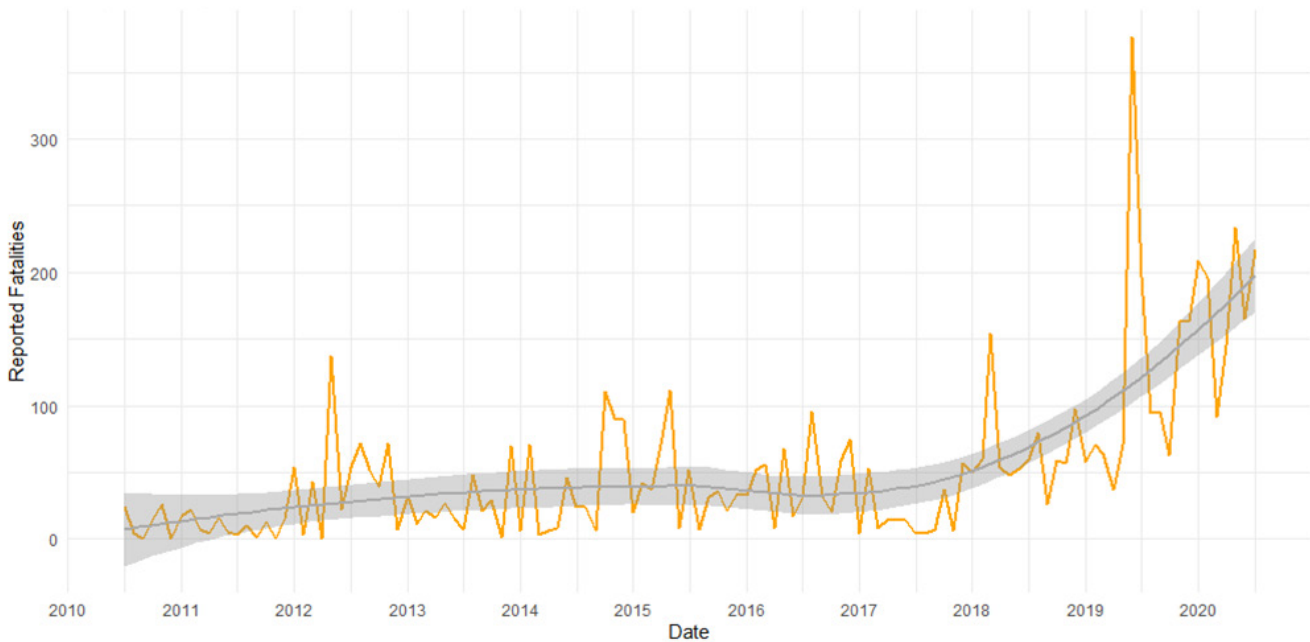
Across the DRC, as of December 2019 there were approximately 5 million people who have been internally displaced as a result of the ongoing violence.[41] The victims of atrocities in eastern DRC tend to fall under a number of identity categories, including particular geographic or residential communities or ethnic groups (where communities are not ethnically homogenous), as well women and children. These groups face significant levels of direct violence and suffer disproportionately from the after-effects perpetuated by armed groups.

The violence has been perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, including a number of ethnically aligned militias, the Congolese national police and the national armed forces. Numerous civilian-led armed groups currently operate in the eastern regions of the country – as of 2019, between 100 and 140 armed groups were identified.[42] Armed groups tend to be aligned with specific identity groups, primarily along ethnic lines, and include militias, community-led self-protection groups (referred to as 'Mayi Mayi' or 'Mai Mai'), as well as foreign armed groups such as the *Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)* from *Uganda and the Rwandan Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda* (FDLR).[43]

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41   UNHCR (2020)
42   United Nations (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2018)
43   The New Humanitarian (2013)

FIGURE 3. QUARTERLY EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY ALLEGED PERPETRATOR (UNJHRO 2019)
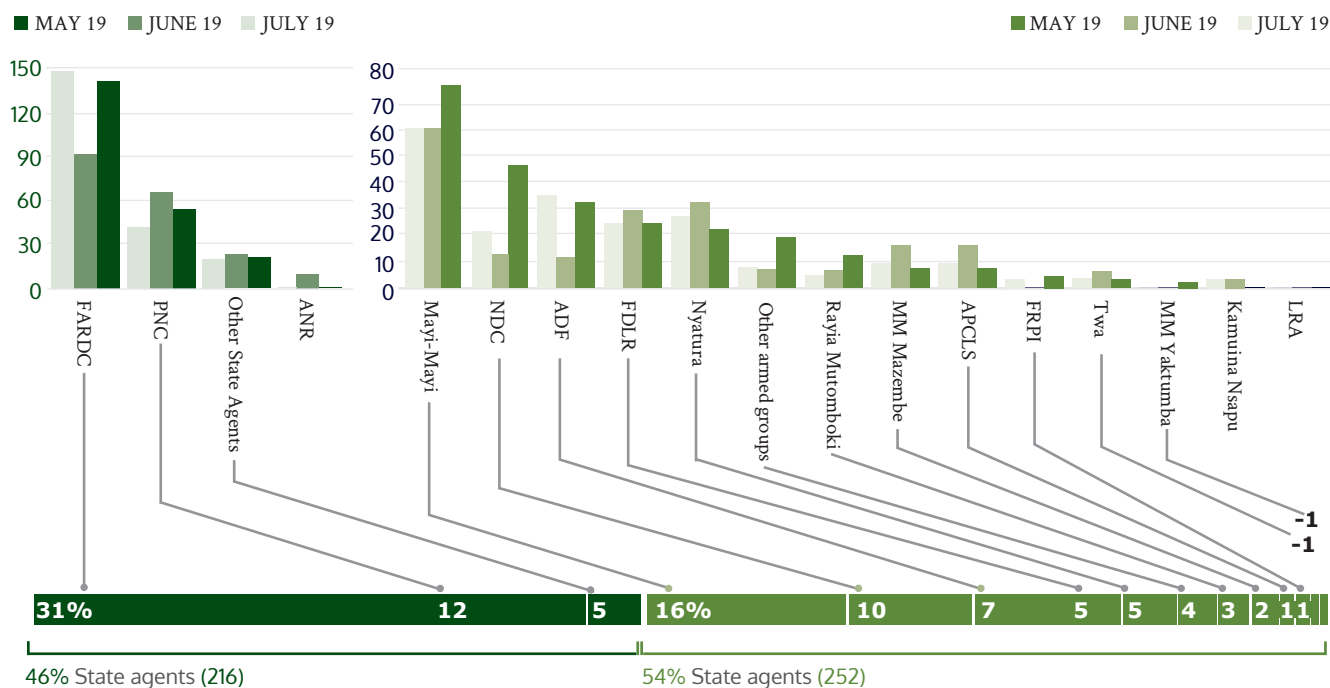
Most non-state armed groups are small in size, although some are "increasingly enmeshed in an unstable web of coalitions, sometimes including wider political and business networks"[44] and are spread across a vast expanse of territory[45]. Many are concentrated in strategic areas in the Kivus, such as the Semuliki Valley, the Ruzizi Plain and around the Virunga National Park, while smaller groups are clustered in areas with high population density such as the Lubero-Nyanzale-Kitchange and Fizi-Uvira axes where they compete for control and influence.[46] Meanwhile, armed groups in Ituri operate primarily out of the Djugu and Mahagi territories.

Additionally, both the Congolese military (FARDC) and the national police (PNC) are frequently cited as perpetrators of violence (Figure 4). During 2019, 46% of all human rights violations recorded for DRC were undertaken by state representatives, with 43% specifically perpetrated by the FARDC and/or the PNC,[47] including 383 cases of conflict-related sexual violence – representing an increase of 34 per cent since 2018.[48]

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44   Stearns and Vogel (2017)
45   For reference, see this map: https://suluhu.org/2017/12/06/new-armed-groups-mapping-biographies/amp/
46   Lucey and Kotsiras (2020)
47   UNJHRO (2019)
48   United Nations Security Council (2020)

2.3 Local perspectives on the current state of violence

When interviewees were asked to describe the main factors that underpinned the atrocities in eastern DRC (including both small and large scale violence), they cited the following factors (in order of importance):

1) land tenure issues – for example inconsistent application of land rights, land grabbing, lack of access to land, and sudden changes in land use;
2) customary and political power struggles;
3) lack of rule of law (absence of or limited access to justice mechanisms);
4) cross-border conflict dynamics (spill over of conflict elements from neighbouring states);
5) domestic natural resource exploitation;
6) the role of the state (including low capacity and complicity in violence);
7) the current security vacuum (absence of effective state security actors); and, to a lesser degree,
8) cross-border resource exploitation.

TABLE 2. MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES

Cause of violence	% of all interviewees reporting
Land tenure issues	88%
Customary and political power struggles	51%
Lack of rule of law	46%
State complicity in violence	46%
Cross-border conflict dynamics	41%
Low state capacity	35%
Domestic natural resource exploitation	32%
Security vacuum	23%

Many of these issues are overlapping and interrelated symptoms (and causes) of state fragility in eastern DRC. For instance, land tenure issues were primarily reported as resulting from contestations between herders and cultivators over access to land for farming, pressures resulting from IDPs returning to land that became occupied during their absence, and a general lack of clarity, documentation and application of land rights. This directly relates to discussions of customary and political power struggles, as power in the DRC is significantly aligned with the management and control of land.

The absence of rule of law, which was linked to a lack of information and understanding of the law amongst communities, but more so to the lack of available, effective or efficient justice mechanisms, further reduces options for peacefully resolving conflict and thus creates conditions whereby violence becomes an effective means to an end. Furthermore, the complicity of state actors in violence, and the low capacity of the state to enforce formal institutions reinforces these dynamics.

Interviewees portrayed a complex relationship between violence and atrocities in eastern DRC. In contrast to international conceptualisations of atrocities that emphasise the scale and deliberate targeting of violence, local actors associate atrocities with the particular "gruesome nature" of an act or the frequency at which certain types of violence occurred, for example the recurrence of small-scale violence between communities over access to land.

When asked, *"what are the main forms of violence experienced in your context?"* interviewees noted (in order of popularity): murders and killings (including small-scale individual events and large-scale atrocities); robbery (referred to either as robbery or looting); abduction and kidnappings; gruesome acts (including decapitation and dismemberment); and rape (small- and large-scale). Interviewees were likely to describe small-scale occurrences of violence such as murder, gruesome acts and rape as atrocities

due to the high frequency of these events occurring, though not necessarily occurring against the same identity group each time.

Interviewees identified communities and/or ethnic groups as the primary victims of recurring violence. The precise definition of 'community' in this context (and within this research overall) was unclear but appeared to overlap with notions of identity, as interviewees frequently mentioned ethnicity and religion when discussing communities. Interviewees noted that the particular ethnic groups that were targeted varied over time and depended on the intended goals and relationships of perpetrators. However, a number of specific ethnic groups were mentioned as particularly at risk of being targeted, including the Nande (North Kivu) who have engaged in conflict with the Hutu and Pakombe (also known as Bapakombes) ethnic groups; the Hema (Ituri) who are mainly in conflict with the Lendu ethnic community; and the Bayamulenge, Babembe, Bafuliru, and Banyindu (South Kivu).[49]

A UN report on Ituri province, released in January 2020, reported that rapes, killings and other forms of violence against the Hema community could amount to crimes against humanity.[50] In addition to ethnic groups, disabled populations, children, perceived foreigners (individuals and groups considered to be of non-Congolese origin, normally of Rwandan decent), women and youth were also cited as primary victims of such violence.

Interviewees identified two broad groups of actors primarily responsible for perpetrating the violence: non-state armed groups and state actors. Interviewees described non-state armed groups in a variety of ways: some were seen as being on behalf of domestic or foreign ethnic groups; while others were based on religion or community (geographic) factors. Armed groups were viewed as being established as a response to the security vacuum in the country and also as a strategic opportunity for gaining or maintaining resources and power amongst groups and individuals.

49   Kleinfeld (2019)
50   OHCHR (2020)

TABLE 3. PRIMARY PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES

Perpetrators of violence	% of all interviewees reporting
Armed groups (based on):	
Communities (local militias)	62%
Ethnicity (DRC)	58%
Ethnicity (foreign)	57%
Unspecified	33%
Religion (foreign and domestic)	10%
State actors:	
Politicians	54%
FARDC (state military)	25%
Customary leaders:	21%
Multinational companies:	21%

State actors were also cited by the majority of interviewees as active perpetrators. These categories included politicians, the military and to a lesser extent the police. Many interviewees blamed politicians for contributing to the violence through 'pulling the strings', feeding the conflicts, sponsoring armed groups or by possessing personal militias which were used to gain and assert political power. An Assistant Director of a CSO from Goma, North Kivu commented that:

"some of these politicians have their own militia groups and manipulate them for their own purpose."

Many interviewees discussed how local military and police use violence as a means to obtain resources to compensate for the limited or non-existent salaries and material support from the state for their work. State actors (primarily politicians) were also viewed at times as working in collaboration with armed groups to maintain political or resource control of areas. Similarly, customary leaders (traditional authorities, normally at community level) were viewed as using violence as a means of exercising control and gaining access to resources.

Finally, multinational companies, particularly oil companies, were identified as at least partially responsible for the violence. Multinational companies were viewed by interviewees as sponsoring armed groups and manipulating contexts for personal gain. For example, a community member from a focus group conducted in Beni, North Kivu noted that:

"there are multinationals that want to profit from natural resources and in order to avoid appearing on the scene, they use small neighbouring countries to create unrest and allow them to exploit mineral resources (gold deposits, oil) without any worries."

3. Current state of atrocity prevention in eastern DRC

Atrocity prevention work in eastern DRC is carried out by a range of actors including local civil society (formal and informal organisations and community-led groups), the UN (MONUSCO), INGOs and other international actors, community leaders and traditional authorities, and to a degree, DRC government actors including the police and military. Civil society appears to play an outsized role in atrocity prevention work, despite receiving relatively little recognition for the primacy of their role amongst international actors.

The primary types of activities reported by local and international atrocity prevention actors within this research are as follows:

TABLE 4. DESCRIPTIONS OF ATROCITY PREVENTION ACTIVITIES IN EASTERN DRC

Early warning and early response (EWER)	This refers to the "systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of: a) anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; b) the development of strategic responses to these crises; and c) the presentation of options to critical actors for the purposes of decision-making."[51]
Dialogue and building relationships between key conflict stakeholders	Activities include round table events or shared projects to facilitate positive relations between actors; with a specific focus on helping communities understand the conflict context, share diverse perceptions, explore solutions to issues, and find ways of ensuring effective communication to prevent conflict.
Building community resilience - local community structures	Creation and use of local structures such as peace committees and peace ambassadors to maintain peaceful relations between groups (these are usually different from the Barazas, mentioned below). Local structures are also used to monitor violence and provide warnings for EWER systems and may be referred to as focal points, land monitors, community liaison assistants, local protection committees, community alert networks. They can prove highly effective especially with incidents in remote and impoverished areas that are difficult to access. Many EWER actors rely on these committees for relevant information.

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51   Schmid (1998)

Research, conflict analyses and mapping	Activities used for exploring the dynamics of conflicts, previous prevention work and determining relevant approaches to prevent further violence. This includes detailed historical mapping to identify trends and evolution of conflict, identify hotspots and determine whether incidents of atrocities have fluctuated over time.
Advocacy	Group activities or coordinated efforts to raise support for specific issues to solicit appropriate responses. Activities tend to be paired with EWER efforts to try to prevent outbreaks or escalations of violence, and to promote increased protection of particular identity groups such as women and pygmy populations. Activities tend to focus on advocating to local authorities and the national government to respond to violent escalations or to protect specific communities vulnerable to attacks, and to a lesser degree, international actors in order to receive funding and/or support for atrocity prevention work.
Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR)	Programmes and activities that work with ex/combatants, at-risk youth, child soldiers and vulnerable women in order to reintegrate them into society after disarmament and demobilisation.
Alternative justice mechanisms and mediation	Activities that provide alternative forms of justice in the absence of effective or credible state justice mechanisms. The mostly popular are community Barazas or 'peace courts', which offer peaceful dispute resolution options to community members.
Awareness raising and sensitisation	Use of radio, press releases, theatre events, house visits, town hall meetings, focus groups and community Barazas to raise awareness on key violence prevention issues such as popular/mob justice, sexual and gender-based violence, human rights, peaceful cohabitation, disarmament and rule of law.

Atrocity prevention activities were not reported to be consistent or necessarily predictable – interviewees reported that, at any given point in time, the type of atrocity prevention activities that take place are determined by what level of capacity actors have and by what type of activity is deemed relevant. Furthermore, and as noted above, the majority of activities were relatively indistinguishable from broader forms of conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. Local actors raised this issue and mentioned that their work is referred to as 'atrocity prevention' when this is what the specific donor or funding opportunity requires.

All stakeholder groups reported conducting the same range of atrocity prevention activities to varying degrees and many of the reported activities appeared overlapping in their remit. Part of the challenge in distinguishing different approaches and the degree to which actors engage in certain activities is related to an apparent lack of specialisation amongst the majority of actors – few stakeholders reported conducting specific activities as their primary work. That being said, some activities were discussed in greater detail by particular actors than others.

The majority of activities reported by civil society actors fall within the category of early warning and early response (EWER) work (discussed in depth in the next section). In addition to EWER activities, CSOs tended to report high levels of awareness raising for issues of sexual and gender-based violence amongst targeted groups through the use of community radios and field visits. CSOs also organise and facilitate the running of local community structures, conduct resilience building work and advocacy activities on atrocity prevention.

Community members and community leaders primarily reported acting as focal points and sources of information for EWER activities conducted by other actors. As community actors have the strongest levels of contextual knowledge, they tend to collaborate with INGOs to provide information and enable access to remote and inaccessible areas for this work. Moreover, community members and leaders make up the majority of permanent dialogue groups established by civil society actors. These groups usually include monitoring committees who report back to larger dialogue groups and EWER actors when they observe issues that could spark violence.

Congolese government actors primarily reported conducting DDR activities, providing basic services such as building infrastructure (e.g. roads), and building the capacity of administration officers as their most common atrocity prevention work. Government actors also take part in Baraza meetings and dialogue events set up by CSOs. The general consensus from non-government interviewees was that government actors are more likely to join protection and stabilisation efforts in response to active violence than engage in prevention efforts.

Congolese security actors (police and national army) reported conducting civilian protection activities through EWER. Army actors reported that they deploy personnel in reaction to threats and according to alerts provided by community members, political, administrative authorities, INGOs and civil society actors. Security actors also engage in dialogue opportunities and awareness raising activities.

Work by INGOs tended to include the training of other AP actors such as CSOs in order to help them carry out effective violence prevention work. INGOs also engage in significant advocacy work, including promoting human rights both at the local and international level to instigate responses and raise awareness around atrocities. INGOs also serve as a link between local and international actors – for instance, they receive alerts from community groups, verify information and send it to other organisations such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Academics typically reported researching and publishing materials on conflict dynamics, taking part in conferences and serving as advisers in violence prevention field interventions.

Finally, MONUSCO interviewees described their atrocity prevention work as primarily involving EWER, research, conflict analyses, mapping and mediation. MONUSCO's Civil Affairs Section implements an early warning system as part of their Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate, which employs community focal points and hosts a "green number" that communities can call to register information on the movements of armed groups and intercommunal tensions. MONUSCO then shares any reported information with local government and provincial authorities to support response. Local actors described MONUSCO as primarily functioning as a partner to government actors by providing technical, material and human support for the prevention of atrocities.

3.1 Early warning and early response activities

To build a picture of the general atrocity prevention setting across the three research locations, interviewees were asked to describe the main types of atrocity prevention activities they conduct. Early warning and early response (EWER) activities were by far the most highly referenced type of work across all actors, some 62% of interviewees explicitly stated that they did this type of work.

EWER relates specifically to the "systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of: a) anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; b) the development of strategic responses to these crises; and c) the presentation of options to critical actors for the purposes of decision-making." [52]

For local actors, the primary activities included under the remit of EWER include: running and managing community EWER structures, networks and information sharing systems for tracking or identifying warning signs of violence, and alerting actors tasked with response work such as protection of civilians.

Local civil society actors frequently play the role of information gatherers, and they tend to report to bodies such as MONUSCO, DRC government actors (including FARDC and PNC) and various INGOs, who are considered to have the necessary means for stopping large-scale violence from erupting. Information is gathered through the tracking of several different 'indicators' used for predicting violence. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the primary indicators mentioned by interviewees:

TABLE 5. MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES

EWER indicator	% of all interviewees responding
Inter-community discord	21%
Rumours	17%
Heightened armed group activity	16%
Mass movement of populations	15%
Hate speech	12%
Killings	12%
Transhumance	10%
Cessation of movement	7%
Harvest periods	6%
Cow theft or killings	6%
Presence of security actors	6%

52   Schmid (1998)

These indicators are informal, they were not derived from any official or universal list and tend to be developed by the atrocity prevention workers depending on their context and experience with a particular type of violence. Table 6 outlines the main indicators of atrocities based on interviews carried out for this project.

TABLE 6. SELF-REPORTED INDICATORS USED BY INTERVIEWEES

EWER indicator	
Cessation of movement	This is the case especially when it concerns specific ethnic groups not turning up at the market, mass movement of communities exiting an area or terminating regular activities such as weekly cultural events.
Cow theft or killings	These events often occur in retaliation for the destruction of crops by the animals or used to signal threats against the owner of the animals.
Demonstrations	These usually signal anger and the mobilisation of individuals.
Heightened armed group activity	This normally comprises of increased recruitment, threats by armed groups, dissemination of leaflets by militias to announce themselves or make demands. Increased movements and clashes between armed groups can sometimes predict greater outbreaks of violence/atrocities.
Identity-based violence	Violence specifically related to identity factors, including rape and killings of ethnic group people. This category has a level of overlap with the category of 'Killings'.
Hate speech	Can be used to incite violence against specific communities. These messages can be transmitted through flyers, social media or in person.
Inter-community discord	Disputes between communities can signal the possible incitement of violence. Signs include inter-community mistrust, refusal to collaborate, threats from both sides and refusal to compromise on standpoints.
Kidnappings	Similar to killing incidents. Repeating cases of kidnappings of specific ethnicities can incite violence.
Killings	Murders, assassinations, and large-scale killings, including those against specific ethnic groups. This category has a level of overlap with the category of 'identity-based violence'.
Mass movement of populations	Mass movement or the presence of unknown persons: including uncontrolled movement of internally displaced persons.
Presence of security actors	This involves the presence of state security forces and/or MONUSCO. AP actors interpret this as a response to anticipated violence. However, some interviewees accused such actors of committing atrocities. Thus, this presence either signals possible violence by other parties or by the security actors themselves.
Rumours	This is often used to highlight specific attitudes towards a given context. However, it has proved to be challenging and resource-heavy for local actors to establish fact from fiction.
Youth mobilisation	Suspicious activities involving the youth: including disappearances and influx of young people, youth groups receiving "vaccinations" against bullets or harm by traditional healers.
Transhumance	This period of heightened movement of cattle has led to trampling of crops and competition over land. Higher levels of violence are likely to occur during this time.

Inter-community discord and the spread of rumours were the most frequently cited indicators, yet even so these were only cited by 21% and 17% of interviewees respectively. Very few interviewees used the same set of indicators as their peers or used a diverse set of indicators within their own EWER activities to identify the multiple stages of early warning for atrocities. For example, the most frequently employed indicator was "inter-community discord", which often related to circumstances where violence was already underway, thus limiting the effectiveness of any response activity.

When asked to describe the systems used for tracking and reporting information related to these indicators, few interviewees referred to any formal mechanisms or systems. Where formal systems did exist (e.g. MONUSCO's community liaison assistant network), local actors tended to act as providers of information rather than recipients, whereas international actors such as the UN were reported as the primary recipients and did not appear to report downwards to community-level actors.

It was not possible to identify any consistent mechanisms or systems for EWER, despite the frequency of EWER activities being reported by local, national and international actors alike. Overall, there was little consistency within the indicators that atrocity prevention actors employ, and limited clarity regarding whether atrocity prevention actors use indicators systematically or on an ad hoc basis.

3.2 Success factors for atrocity prevention

Despite the vast amount of work being conducted for atrocity prevention, the significant recurring episodes of violence in DRC signal a gap in the effectiveness of such work. Interviewees were asked to identify and explain what they felt were "key factors for success" in atrocity prevention in order to understand what forms of support might be most beneficial for improving the impact of their work.

As seen in Table 7, the key factors identified by interviewees as most important for success were: having sufficient financial resources for atrocity prevention actors; engagement of community members in atrocity prevention work; coordination and collaboration between actors and activities; involvement of state actors (e.g. when FARDC and PNC carry out their civilian protection responsibilities as mandated); and reliable EWER systems.

TABLE 7. FACTORS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES

Success factor	% of all interviewees reporting
Sufficient financial resourcing	42%
Community engagement	32%
Coordination and collaboration b/w AP actors	30%
State involvement	30%
Reliable early warning systems	17%

Many interviewees noted the importance of having sufficient financial resources, and in particular having the right amount of funding, rather than simply having funding, was cited as key for the ability of all stages of atrocity prevention activities to be carried out. Without sufficient resources, interviewees noted that EWER mechanisms often fulfilled the 'early warning' aspect of their mandate, but fell short on the 'response', thus failing to actually prevent violence from occurring. Having sufficient resources were identified as key for diverse aspects of work, including but not limited to paying the salaries of key actors (including military and police) and acquiring necessary equipment and materials (e.g. vehicles, petrol, mobile phones, etc.).

Community engagement in atrocity prevention work was also frequently discussed as a key factor for success and was viewed as essential for ensuring community buy-in and support from areas of intervention. This normally involved community members partaking in multiple aspects of programme implementation. Furthermore, community engagement is essential for ensuring the sustainability of such work. For instance, community members were able to continue implementing activities when civil society or state actors exit or were unable to access a particular area for response. Moreover, those actively partaking in projects ended up gaining skills and experience that could feed into overall positive developments in their communities.

The broad topics of 'coordination and collaboration' emerged as common and vital themes throughout the research.

- *Coordination* refers to the extent to which atrocity prevention activities are not duplicative of one another, but rather serve to compliment and reinforce the capacity of ongoing work.
- *Collaboration* refers to how well different atrocity prevention actors are able to work together, including to ensure strong coordination between respective activities.

As such, the two concepts are inherently linked. The majority of interviewees noted that collaboration brought several advantages to their work, including improved access to information, reduced duplication of activities, and higher levels of coordination for effective response to early warnings. Collaboration includes both vertical collaboration between state and non-state actors, and horizontal collaboration between non-state actors. A majority of security sector, INGO, CSOs and government interviewees cited collaboration as contributing to success in their AP work.

Interviewees noted that coordination and collaboration were essential aspects of successful prevention work for filling gaps in the knowledge, resourcing and physical capacity of atrocity prevention actors across the board. For instance, CSOs can gain access to communities to implement atrocity prevention activities more easily by working with community leaders to gain trust from the local population. CSOs can also provide support to these community leaders to maintain peace, train elected members as peace ambassadors and resolve conflicts in their communities before they turn violent. In turn, INGOs collaborated with both of these stakeholder groups to support their work through gaining contextual knowledge, whilst also providing support in the form of funding, training or partnerships with such local actors.

This form of collaboration can prove highly useful for ensuring that atrocity prevention activities are flexible and effective in the underfunded and volatile contexts where atrocity prevention takes place. This form of collaboration is exemplified by a Programme Manager from an INGO in Beni, South Kivu, who stated:

"We work in collaboration with civil society, the local community, NGOs, MONUSCO and the FARDC SSU (Unité d'Appui à la Stabilisation de la MONUSCO) and Civil Affairs of MONUSCO. In this collaboration with actors, SSU provides funding and strategic support, Civil Society provides data sharing, government actors provide strategic support. We have set up the early warning mechanism through Civil Society, through community leaders and youth leaders."

Coordination and collaboration were also considered essential for forging both vertical and horizontal relationships across atrocity prevention actors, with the ideal outcome being more coordinated activities and the eventual reinforcing of the state as the primary source of atrocity prevention.

Given the complex nature of atrocity prevention work in eastern DRC it was acknowledged that the coordination and inclusion of stakeholders across different levels (e.g. community and international) and domains (e.g. EWER activities and relationship building work) were necessary to effectively address all aspects of atrocity prevention – prevention, response and recovery.

For instance, while non-state actors such as CSOs and community members are best placed for tracking and sharing information related to local early warning signs of atrocities, they depend on Congolese security actors and MONUSCO personnel to provide responses to such warnings by deploying security actors to protect civilians and de-escalate violence.[53] The Coordinator of a CSO in Ituri reflected on how such collaboration can take place:

"With the NGOs, we analyse the conflict transformation theme and we delegate one of the members to do the follow-up. We see this collaboration as a spill-over for us because we collect data and pass it on to another member organisation. For example, for the I4S project, we are in the community dialogue, when there is a problem in the field related to the armed group, we give it to [another local organisation] which is in STAREC[54] in order to follow this problem."

Interviewees noted a number of specific advantages of effective coordination and collaboration.

Information sharing: collaboration through networks and clusters was cited as highly effective for supporting EWER activities, including sharing and triangulating information and alerts, analysing data, setting up and managing strategies for coordination of interventions, and ensuring activities are informed by local contexts analyses. For instance, a CSO based in Kalehe, South Kivu stated:

"Most of these collaborations entail information-sharing on incidents of violence, notably sexual and gender-based violence and armed attacks".

Many of the actors engaged in EWER activities are members of clusters or networks to support these activities, with networks being primarily informal mechanisms and clusters being formal. Clusters are most often comprised of local, national and international actors across different sectors.

Mitigation of security concerns: collaboration is important in reducing the risks of physical harm associated with conducting violence prevention work in highly volatile areas. Some local actors noted that working with security actors can prove beneficial in ensuring their safety whilst

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53   Of course, local actors are sometimes able to de-escalate violence in the absence of security actors through the use of peace courts and relationship building work, however the effectiveness and scale of these approaches is limited.
54   STAREC was primarily designed for armed conflict-affected areas, especially in eastern DRC. It was launched by the Congolese Government, with the support of the United Nations system and development technical partners. Its main goal is to restore State authority in the East which is the region that is the most fragile and exposed to conflicts.

conducting atrocity prevention work because security personnel can act as a point of contact to respond to violence. A CSO agent in Beni, North Kivu noted that as part of their work, they:

"have done joint advocacy with other civil society actors on the case of insecurity. The authorities provided us with a map of the city's security services. In case of an alert in a corner we are now able to know who the nearest person or association is to contact. And this has reduced the case of insecurity in Beni town."

Capacity building: effective collaboration and coordination between actors was particularly helpful for building mutual capacity, as well as capacity for sustainable local atrocity prevention systems. For example, where CSOs are able to teach local communities to carry out sensitisation work, this builds the capacity of community members so that local committees continue carrying out work even after atrocity prevention actors have exited or lost funding. In some cases, atrocity prevention actors can build each other's capacities through training and information sharing. A Programme Officer of an INGO in Beni, North Kivu stated that they:

"work with UN agencies..., state services, the local community and civil society. This collaborative work consists of institutional support (logistical supplies, materials, capacity building, popularization of texts and laws), data sharing."

Avoiding duplication: where different actors work for the same objective in the same location, coordination and collaboration enables them to work in complementary ways, which in turn makes atrocity prevention efforts more efficient and ensures that the right actors are providing appropriate responses corresponding to specific areas. For example, the Head of Programmes at a CSO in Uvira, South Kivu described an occasion when coordinating with other actors proved useful in avoiding duplication of work:

"At the level of Bwegera, the consortium had planned to create AVECs (Village Savings and Credit Associations), having understood that [the local organisation] had already installed them, they went to Lubirizi. At the Lubirizi level, [another local organisation] was doing non-punitive and non-paying conflict resolution linked to prevention. Two organisations... arrived with the same activities. Being informed of the activities carried out in the field by [the local organisation], instead of doing prevention in the same community, they did security."

Funding and sharing of resources: many actors reported effective collaboration through funding and resource sharing. This could be in the form of donor-recipient relationships, with international organisations, such as INGOs, providing direct funding to local CSOs. Actors can also share resources such as internet and transport services. This provision of resources allows actors to carry out their work and reach their objectives despite shortcomings in available capital. For instance, the Coordinator of a CSO in Beni, North Kivu noted that:

"the collaboration allows mutual help, as our organisation has an internet connection that is taken care of by one partner, the other organisations come to use this connection to share reports in case of an emergency."

Interviewees were also asked what changes in the current atrocity prevention landscape would be most beneficial to successful atrocity prevention outcomes. The most commonly cited change mentioned was "increased state capacity and transparency", primarily for increased clarity and application of laws, including land tenure systems and justice systems to address the root causes of violence, including impunity of perpetrators. In general, interviewees viewed the state as a necessary and essential partner in providing atrocity and violence response, as well as for securing civilian safety overall.

4. Key challenges for atrocity prevention in eastern DRC

The research sought to understand the primary challenges that exist for atrocity prevention in order to identify what forms of support and areas of investment would be most beneficial to improving current practice. Interviewees were asked to discuss the key factors that negatively impacted their atrocity prevention work. Table 8 provides the breakdown of the most frequent responses:

TABLE 8. NEGATIVE FACTORS FOR ATROCITY PREVENTION REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES

Negative factor	% of all interviewees responding
Low collaboration and coordination	44%
Safety of atrocity prevention actors	43%
Issues of state fragility:	42%
Lack of secure land tenure	49%
Low state capacity	21%
Delayed/lack of intervention	16%
State complicity in violence	10%
Under-resourcing and over-projectisation	41%

4.1 Coordination and collaboration in atrocity prevention activities

A lack of effective coordination and collaboration amongst atrocity prevention actors was cited as the most significant negative factor for successful atrocity prevention. Interviewees noted that when atrocity prevention actors failed to coordinate and collaborate effectively, the potential for prevention was significantly reduced (due to low information sharing, increased duplication of work, and reduced response rates). Two primary issues were discussed as generally reducing the ability of atrocity prevention actors to effectively coordinate and collaborate: weak or absent atrocity prevention mechanisms and low levels of trust between actors.

Figure 4: What is a National Mechanism?

National mechanisms for atrocity crimes are "officially established bodies that include representatives from multiple areas of government relevant to the prevention of atrocity crimes." These bodies may include within their structure ministries of foreign affairs, justice, defence, national human rights institutions, ministries of education and national security forces. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, representatives of civil society also tend to have membership in their national mechanisms. National mechanisms differ between contexts, but four major themes emerge in their mandates and activities:

1. Risk assessment and early warning, including data gathering and analysis using an atrocity prevention lens, in order to detect patterns of group vulnerability and to alert the appropriate authorities that are able to take the recommended course of early action;
2. Development of training programmes for civil servants and other relevant actors in society, which offer preventive approaches and practical tools that are able to be employed at the local and national levels;
3. Recommendation and elaboration of policies geared towards the protection of vulnerable populations from risks of genocide and other atrocity crimes; and
4. Communication and partnership building with regional and international organisations on issues related to the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes.

4.1.a Weak or absent atrocity prevention mechanisms

One of the most noteworthy challenges to effective atrocity prevention work is the apparent absence of formalised structures which support and foster coordination and collaboration between actors. The lack of a functioning, well-resourced national mechanism for atrocity prevention, an absence of more localised or provincial mechanisms, as well as a lack of adherence to regional mechanisms (in this case, The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region – ICGLR) has resulted in a lack of consistency or coordination between current atrocity prevention activities, including existing EWER activities.

Efforts to establish a national mechanism to support and streamline atrocity prevention work in the DRC have had limited success. In 2014, the DRC National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination was created under the auspices of the ICGLR.[55] It comprised representatives from various government sectors and non-state actors representing different sectors to engage in initiatives that consider specific risk factors rendering the country susceptible to genocide and atrocity crimes.

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55   The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) is an inter-governmental organisation of the countries in the African Great Lakes Region. Its establishment was based on the recognition that political instability and conflicts in these countries have a considerable regional dimension and thus require a concerted effort in order to promote sustainable peace and development. It is composed of 12 members states, including the DRC. See http://www.icglr.org/index.php/en/background for reference.

However, the structure is not well known amongst atrocity prevention actors in eastern DRC, as no interviewees mentioned it during the research. This indicates that there is lack of full domestication and mainstreaming of regional normative frameworks at the national level, and that the existing national mechanism has not been established in a sustainable manner.

External actors who conduct atrocity prevention activities were seen to work in silos and have failed to engage with state mechanisms or support the development of locally owned prevention mechanisms. For instance, multiple interviewees noted a widespread frustration with MONUSCO for 'missing the opportunity' to invest its substantial time and resources into building the capacity of local actors and prevention infrastructure[56] over its 20-year term. This failure has led to a reduction in the ability of local actors to conduct effective response work.

The lack of a functioning national or regional prevention mechanism may also influence the ability of prevention activities to be conducted in a strategic manner. For instance, there are high levels of duplication of activities and consistent lack of clarity regarding how atrocity prevention activities relate to other prevention agendas.

The Executive Director of a CSO in Ituri, North & South Kivu with offices in Goma noted that:

"there is an issue of a lot of INGOs coming to work in the country for 6 months then leaving – there is no mechanism of continuity of the work".

This point was further expanded on by members of a focus group discussion of CSOs in Uvira, South Kivu who lamented that:

"there is no exchange of reports between the different actors, which means that the interventions are focused each time on the situation at the beginning instead of taking the next step or continuity. We remain in perpetual beginnings."

As a result of absent information sharing to enable effective coordination and collaboration, atrocity prevention work ends up being highly duplicative, siloed and short-term.

The consensus from interviewees was that atrocity prevention cannot be done by local actors alone, and there was an overwhelming sentiment that the responsibility for atrocity prevention and civilian protection indeed sits largely with the state. This was highlighted by an academic from Beni, North Kivu who asserted that:

"there are also changes that are necessary on the side of the public power, of the State. The state should become more involved and provide itself and the whole system with sufficient resources. At present, when you call a toll-free number of the police, they answer that they don't have fuel, or they arrive two hours after the bandits have left and then they ask for fuel!"

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56 'Infrastructure' entails prevention tools and approaches, physical equipment such as shared offices, vehicles and technological equipment such as drones, and a shared prevention framework based on previous UN work that actors can refer to in order to align their work and prevent silos between atrocity prevention actors' work.

At the moment, the implementation of a national mechanism does not appear feasible due to a lack of sustainable resourcing, low capacity of government actors, and an absence of prevention infrastructure for implementation at the local level. However, without any formal mechanisms, local atrocity prevention activities face significant deficits in standardisation and coordination of activities, resource sharing and information sharing. As such, it is essential that actions are taken towards developing local and provincial infrastructure for prevention mechanisms. This will be a key step for 'bridging the gap' between national and local or regional efforts and may present significant opportunities for the Government to gain increased credibility and legitimacy amongst its citizenry, eventually enabling a national mechanism to take root to function sustainably.

In the context of MONUSCO's eventual withdrawal from several provinces in the foreseeable future, it is also vital that steps are taken by local and international actors alike to ensure sufficient mechanisms are put in place to support civil society as MONUSCO exits these areas. As noted by interviewees, MONUSCO's exit could result in rising atrocities in the area. This was expressed by an INGO staff member in Goma, North Kivu who stated that "MONUSCO – currently withdrawing (3-year timeline) but this withdrawal shouldn't happen without concrete improvements in the situation". Furthermore, as stated by a senior MONUSCO staff member:

"If the drawdown is to happen, the challenge is to have a responsible draw-down and pull-out. We can't just leave – we will be back here in five years."

However, specific challenges have undermined opportunities for a responsible MONUSCO transition to occur. Large cuts to MONUSCO's budget (primarily by the United States in 2017) were cited by interviewees as responsible for "crippling the mission". For instance, in current activities, these budget cuts have effectively forced UN staff to pick and choose where to provide responses and have led to a high number of standing combat deployments being cancelled due to cost. A senior level MONUSCO staff member stated:

"Remember the UN is a big bureaucracy…and it [relies on] member states' money, so at the end of the day, it has to show how that money is spent…[Mission support] are looking at this from a purely logistical and cost point of view… say there are two areas of concern. One is here and one is 50 kilometres away. We want to put troops here and troops there. And the commander may say on the ground 'well I don't have the troops; it has to be one of the two'."

At the time of conducting this research, MONUSCO's ground troops had recently been reduced to just 15,000 troops for the whole country, which has meant that while MONUSCO's EWER systems appear effective in raising alerts and identifying appropriate actions, the organisation does not actually have the staff and resources required to carry out effective responses in the majority of cases. The same senior staff member asserted that:

"15,000 troops is nothing here. You can put three US army divisions in here and it won't make a dent in the place. It is just so big and so inaccessible at times, and this has knock-on effects for us in mandate implementation. Poor lines of communication, mains supply routes, etc."

The reduced number of ground troops coupled with decreased financial resources for mission infrastructure, such as vehicles and troop salaries, has meant that existing MONUSCO activities have been reduced. This has direct implications on the ability of MONUSCO staff to effectively plan and implement a responsible exit strategy. Ensuring atrocities do not increase during this period and that local atrocity prevention actors are well equipped to provide response will therefore require a comprehensive and well-resourced exit strategy.

A core goal of this strategy should be to identify opportunities for transferring resources and infrastructure from the UN to local actors, including government, civil society and local NGOs, in order to support the development of formal local and regional prevention mechanisms after MONUSCO's withdrawal. As part of this process, the UN should prioritise opportunities to re-build trust and working relationships between the Congolese government, the FARDC and civil society and to reinforce the work of other UN entities whose presence may be building up (e.g. OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, etc.) so that they can undertake their core missions with better community engagement to support government/ civil society capacity development and cohesion.

4.1.b Low levels of trust between atrocity prevention actors

A significant issue impacting effective coordination and collaboration is low levels of trust between actors, including vertically between local and state actors and horizontally amongst local CSOs. Specifically, the low capacity of the DRC government and the role of state actors in acts of violence and criminality, rather than protecting civilians, have created conditions whereby atrocity prevention actors have very low trust in government and security actors. Civil society actors also questioned the intentions behind government actors' requests for collaboration, assuming they might be veiled attempts to advance political interests. A MONUSCO staff member observed that:

"when there is an increase in violent incidents, there is a decrease of public trust in the government. When security forces are deployed to deal with this, at first the population's distrust increases, sometimes the security actors become the perpetrators."

As one CSO coordinator in Bunia, Ituri stated, there is an issue regarding "security incidents on killings, who to report to? Because whoever we were supposed to report to seems to be complicit. Sometimes the authorities know ahead of time that [someone] would have killed, but nothing is done." These phenomena serve to erode trust between atrocity prevention actors and the state, thus reducing the capacity of actors on both sides.

The ability of state actors to provide the response solicited from early warnings and general prevention work is particularly impacted by the lack of trust, as they lack necessary local networks and relationships for carrying out effective work.

It is important to highlight that for many interviewees, atrocity prevention work was actually considered to be most effective when it took place in collaboration with state actors, and primarily when local communities and atrocity prevention actors were able to forge connections and relationships with state actors. In such cases, the perception of state actors amongst community members improved significantly and contributed to broader feelings of stability. Furthermore, these relationships afforded higher levels of credibility and legitimacy to the state amongst local actors. This type of shift is essential for strengthening state-society relations; but it is relatively uncommon. Building trust between actors will be essential in developing sustainable and effective local, regional and eventually national prevention mechanisms.

Beyond the relationship with state actors, CSOs also reported high levels of distrust within the CSO community. Local actors reportedly questioned the objectives of CSOs and whether some of these organisations were created to serve a specific ethnic group or community's interest. An academic in Uvira, South Kivu highlighted this issue, noting that:

"currently there is little acceptance of collaboration, as MONUSCO and NGOs are adept at facilitating Banyamulenge. When Banyamulenge are attacked they intervene directly. When it comes to other communities, they intervene only with a delay. And say, "we are still waiting for an order.""

This is largely a result of the complex history of identity being used as a political and economic tool, particularly the use of ethnic mobilisation for violence. The impacts of identity's role in eastern DRC are thus not only related to violence, but has also permeated and become salient within atrocity prevention work.

The low levels of trust, both horizontal and vertical, are not insurmountable. Interviewees noted that trust has been rebuilt in many instances through the use of ongoing or one-off "dialogue" activities (also referred to as "community exchange" events), often but not always with the support of external actors (e.g. INGOs or foreign donors). Dialogues were described as practitioner forums whereby local, state and international prevention actors are given the space to come together to jointly analyse work, conduct conflict analyses and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Broader forums, such as community peace forums, have brought together wider groups of stakeholders to discuss tensions and find mutually agreeable solutions to local conflict. These may include traditional authorities, such as religious leaders, as well as key actors in conflict dynamics such as landowners, local government, security forces and victims. Interviewees noted that these forums have been essential for rebuilding vertical and horizontal trust not only between atrocity prevention actors, but also with and between the community members impacted by violence.

Dialogue and forum activities have provided local actors opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other's work, which in turn has broken down barriers that prevented collaboration from taking place. These activities offer a relatively inexpensive but highly effective way of developing and enhancing local capacity and institutions by forging relationships where there have previously been gaps. As such, external actors, particularly those who fund prevention activities, should seek to understand how and what they can support in terms of opportunities for exchange and relationship building between atrocity prevention actors across all levels. Exchange opportunities will also present key avenues for strengthening local and regional linkages, and networks for formal prevention mechanisms, thus contributing to any longer-term goals of an effective national mechanism.

4.2 Safety of atrocity prevention actors

Unsurprisingly, the physical safety of atrocity prevention actors was cited as a significant challenge for effective atrocity prevention (43% of interviewees responding). This is primarily related to the fact that atrocity prevention actors are targeted by perpetrators and are also at higher risk of indiscriminate violence as a result of their presence in generally high-risk areas.

In some cases, civil society interviewees asserted that were 'spied on' by state actors and wrongly accused of attempting to disrupt work and stir up anti-government sentiments. Government actors are perceived as deliberately intimidating local actors to discourage their work, an Executive Director of a CSO in Goma, North Kivu notes that there was a time when he:

"was watched by authorities because I did early warning on sexual and gender-based violence... I nearly lost my life as authorities went in search for me – 4 army jeeps went in search for me. They held my head of programmes who disappeared for nearly a week before he was set free due to the EWER work we did."

Actors have had to flee their homes and country as they have become targets after whistleblowing or denouncing acts such as human rights abuses. In some cases, atrocity prevention actors have been targeted by communities themselves who suspect/ misunderstand their intentions for working in their contexts. This, compounded by the complicity of state actors, low state capacity and a general lack of rule of law, has meant that stakeholders engaged in atrocity prevention work are often vulnerable as they are not able to rely on the state for protection. There appears to be a general consensus that atrocity prevention work in Eastern DRC goes hand-in-hand with insecurity for actors engaged in such work.

As discussed in section 4.1, local atrocity prevention actors have worked with trusted security actors to mitigate security concerns. In some areas, they have worked with community members with in-depth knowledge of contexts or community leaders who inspire buy-in from communities to alleviate security concerns and enjoy community recognition and protection. Actors have also relied on their reputation as trustworthy and transparent agents to instil respect for their work and colleagues. As such, supporting and promoting effective atrocity prevention must include measures to ensure the safety and security of atrocity prevention actors. Significant improvements to existing security threats can be achieved through increased collaboration and coordination between actors and communities.

4.3 Issues of state fragility

Issues of state fragility were raised in varying ways by interviewees as a key challenge for atrocity prevention. Interviewees cited that the state is considered a necessary actor (if not the central actor) for providing responses and applying the law to ensure that perpetrators are punished, and civilian safety is guaranteed. The weakness of government institutions and actors were cited as having compound negative impacts on local atrocity prevention work and on the root causes of atrocities more broadly.

4.3.a. Lack of secure land tenure

The challenge of land tenure systems in eastern DRC was one of the most frequently mentioned issues throughout the research. While infrequently cited in international prevention frameworks and rarely a focus of externally funded prevention activities, land issues appear to be one of the most salient factors underpinning the cyclical nature of violence in the region. This relates both to the common underlying causes of violence, as well as to how identity has been historically and currently employed within contestations over land.

The misalignment of customary and state land tenure systems, in addition to a general dearth of knowledge regarding Congolese legal rights and systems, was discussed by interviewees as a primary factor fuelling violence between key conflict stakeholders. This was particularly problematic when local communities adhere to divergent tenure systems: those who view land rights as rooted in ancestry and customary laws, and those who employ state laws or conflicting customary laws. Furthermore, where conflicts are taken to state justice systems, Congolese courts recognise state laws, which in turn can instigate violence with unsatisfied parties carrying out reprisal attacks.

Whilst describing conflict dynamics in Beni, North Kivu, one academic stated "land - this is the trigger and recurrent element. The indigenous people (Bambuba, Wataliga, Watakombe) think that the non-indigenous people (Nande) have come to invade their land, hence the identity crisis."

Interviewees noted that the significance of land conflicts and their ability to manifest as atrocities should not be taken for granted, and that reducing the conditions for atrocities requires state actors to promulgate land laws, ensuring that these are clear and applied effectively, and are not undermined by competing forms of local authority.

Furthermore, reconciling customary and state laws was seen as essential for preventing escalations of violence and recurring conflicts. When making recommendations for changes to increase the effectiveness of future atrocity prevention work, an academic from Uvira, South Kivu stressed, "let the state revisit the texts of the laws (which amplify the conflicts)."

Issues around land rights and land use are further complicated by the multiple ways natural resources are used to fuel and sustain violence in eastern DRC. Interviewees cited the use of resources, such as diamonds and gold, to fund the costs of maintaining armed groups. When discussing the mining of gold, the Coordinator of a CSO in Bunia, Ituri stated that:

"FRPI (Patriotic Force for the Resistance of Ituri) has remained in the south of the Irumu territory, chiefdom of Balendu-Bindi since 2002 until today. This militia remained in control of all the mines in the Balendu-Bindi chiefdom."

Neighbouring countries were also accused of employing opportunities to exploit resources in the region. According to the Executive Director of a CSO in Goma, North Kivu, "there are also neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda – conflict in DRC is supported by partners in these neighbouring countries in order to exploit the rich mineral resources."

Similarly, multinational corporations were accused of using violence in eastern DRC to exploit resources – interviewees have highlighted multinationals funding armed groups or working with national actors such as politicians to exploit resources at the detriment of the population. A security actor from Uvira, South Kivu highlighted that:

"the perpetrators of the violence in eastern DRC are the multinationals. They are organised in a network with two or three armed groups that they orchestrate. They are the ones waging war in the world."

Hence, resource competition has not only further complicated claims over land but has also directly fed into the violence in eastern DRC, both at the national and international level. This again reflects the necessity of ensuring proper regulation and implementation of land rights in the DRC in underlying factors of atrocities.

As such, the issues around land and identity in eastern DRC represent a key area for developing early warning indicators that can identify 'turning points' in local violence. Because of the direct relationship between identity and land, and thus the relationship between land conflicts enabling escalation to atrocities, indicators that specifically track the use of land, management of land, land rights, and changes in social relationships related to land might offer early-stage awareness of potential ethnic mobilisation for atrocities. As shown in the list of indicators in Table 5 (Section 3.1), these types of factors are currently not being tracked by local atrocity prevention actors in EWER activities. It was not clear whether international actors, such as MONUSCO, employ indicators around land within their systems.

Due to the prevalence of land issues mentioned throughout this research, it seems essential that actors across all forms of prevention develop better understandings of the relationships between land issues and the risk of atrocities in eastern DRC. Currently, there is limited available data on issues of land and land conflict, and almost no research and analysis of these dynamics within academia or practice.[57]

Issues of land should be placed at the centre of conflict analysis and accompanying prevention or response plans, particularly for atrocity and broader violence prevention. If land issues are not addressed, any prevention activities will have no more than a surface-level remedial impact as the vulnerabilities resulting from land insecurity will persist and facilitate recurring conflict.

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57   Boone (2014)

4.3.b. Government complicity in atrocities

A consistent narrative shared by interviewees was the impact of state actors' complicity in the ongoing violence in eastern DRC. This narrative is validated by external data for the DRC: from July-September 2019, half of the 1,441 human rights violations and abuses documented across DRC by MONUSCO were committed by state actors, and the other half by militias, with 26% of violations being conducted by FARDC soldiers.[58]

In a context where government actors are severely under-funded and under-resourced, it is unsurprising that actors take advantage of opportunities to gain increased political power, access to natural resources and ownership of land, which has resulted in cases where government actors have been complicit in atrocities. Successful atrocity prevention has been severely undermined by this. An INGO staff member affirmed that:

"Impunity and absence of justice over 20 years has created overarching systemic challenges – it is hard to prevent violence when violence is state sanctioned".

This means that any incentive by the state to engage in atrocity prevention work is constantly undermined by certain state actors profiting from the violence. As a result, local actors (e.g. CSOs and community members) have expressed dissatisfaction with government actors. For instance, a Director of a CSO in North Kivu proclaimed that they:

"had a warning system but it was abandoned because it was a counter-productive system. We felt that there was complicity between the perpetrators and the authorities; when the alert was given it was used by the authority to warn the criminal to flee."

Similarly, a CSO coordinator in Bunia, Ituri, noted that there is: "complicity of the government in atrocities…. the weakness of the government, not ensuring the protection of the population, people are in the dark. The declarations for the denunciation of what is happening are repressed and the initiators prosecuted by the government."

As Congolese security forces are accused of committing atrocities and human rights violations against civilians, working with them risks inadvertently contributing to such crimes.

Additionally, anti-MONUSCO sentiment within the population increases when it is perceived that MONUSCO refuses to support FARDC due to fears of human rights violations as a result of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP)[59]. For some people, it is hard to understand MONUSCO's perceived preference for protecting human rights over providing support for FARDC in the face of atrocities because MONUSCO is considered a key provider of violence response work. One MONUSCO employee noted:

"The people think MONUSCO can do many things, with very high expectations. They think that MONUSCO can solve all the problems of insecurity in the context. So, when there is a problem, they expect more from MONUSCO than from the national police or the army. MONUSCO is supposed to be supporting these authorities with responding, not replacing them. This causes tensions and animosity."

In summary, state complicity in atrocities has fed into the violence in eastern DRC, and has hindered the DRC government's ability to effectively engage in atrocity prevention work, both autonomously and in collaboration with local and international actors. Addressing the role of state actors' complicity in the violence is therefore a fundamental step in reducing DRC's vulnerability to atrocities.

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58   UN Security Council (2019)
59   Levine-Spound (2020)

4.3.c. Low state capacity

Finally, the absence of state authority and the overall low capacity of the government has made it difficult to exercise control of eastern DRC, including the application of laws, reducing impunity and addressing the root causes of violence. The consensus among interviewees is that the Congolese government lacks the necessary resources to be effective in all areas of the country, reflecting a core condition of state fragility. Regarding the challenges facing atrocity prevention work, an INGO staff member from Goma, North Kivu indicated that:

"absence of the state is the most challenging issue, especially the problems with the Congolese army".

Impunity is rife in some areas in eastern DRC, allowing perpetrators to commit violence without fear of punishment. High levels of impunity discourage people from reporting crimes for fear of reprisal attacks by perpetrators. In some cases, whistle-blowers or those that provide alerts have had to flee their homes or country due to threats. According to a focus group discussion with community leaders in Bunia, Ituri:

"we report the signals to the army or police hotlines. But the answer always comes late. The problem with whistleblowing is that the whistle-blower becomes a potential target for the one who's been reported."

Thus, some communities choose to punish the perpetrators themselves whereas others rely on Mai Mai groups for protection whilst refusing to denounce these militia groups for committing atrocities. The Coordinator of a CSO in Goma, North Kivu illustrated this issue by saying that:

"in order to protect themselves, the communities have armed groups. NDC (Nduma Defense of Congo)- a Mai Mai group was born because members of their community were being killed, threatened in Walikale. Thus, they questioned why their community should be left to be abused by the Rwandan communities.... If you try to explain to the community that the NDC are bad, they will not believe you because the government has not defended the population there. So, for some communities, thanks to NDC, they can sleep and live well. This leads to a culture of impunity where these communities will not denounce the NDC. Even though people are aware that these armed groups are not good, they are still seen as better than others."

The overall lack of government capacity has often led to counterproductive results when national systems have been applied in the local context. For instance, in the case of DDR programs, armed groups have either regrouped or intensified violence in response to the government's inability to uphold agreements and support socio-economic reintegration.

Low government capacity has also led to a lack of responses to early warning alerts due to the absence of resources, including appropriate technical supplies such as suitable vehicles for rough terrain, as well as properly trained and resourced personnel. In some areas, government actors have solicited bribes in order to respond to issues, whilst others have forced those that provide alerts to testify in court due to a lack of capacity and means to follow the proper channels in apprehending and punishing perpetrators.

A CSO Head of Programmes in Uvira, Ituri asserted that "working with the authorities poses challenges. When it comes to finding the solution with local authorities, the authorities pose a logistical problem and sometimes the authorities ask for bribes before signing off to close the mediation files." On some occasions, even if these channels exist, the level of bureaucracy and the highly centralised system limits prompt responses and often leads to overall failures in response.

However, and as mentioned in the previous sections, interviewees stressed the importance of involving the DRC government in atrocity prevention as it is their role to provide security, protection and uphold the rule of law. Interviewees noted that building and reinforcing the response capacities of government security actors engaged in atrocity prevention in DRC would significantly improve atrocity prevention as a whole. Such reinforcement could involve training for personnel, increased financial support, and material resources such as appropriate vehicles and logistical support.

Efforts to improve the capacity and functioning of state institutions overall was reported to be essential for ensuring effective atrocity prevention, particularly for EWER systems. For instance, "reforming the army and equipping it with the necessary means for effective deterrence" was recommended by an academic from Uvira, South Kivu, as a necessary step for future peace in the country. The long-term sustainability of prevention efforts in eastern DRC is thus inherently tied to such changes.

4.4 Under-resourcing and over projectisation of atrocity prevention work

The final critical issue is the role of financial resourcing on the outcomes of prevention work in eastern DRC. The amount of funding provided, as well as traditional approaches to funding, significantly influences the success and sustainability of atrocity prevention efforts.

Projectisation of funding for atrocity prevention activities was frequently cited as a key challenge. A Court Secretary of a CSO in South Kivu emphasised that "first and foremost, there are many financial challenges – most of their funds are tied to projects in structured programmes." This affects their work for example, in running alternative justice systems "most of the Barazas are voluntary, and there are several logistical challenges around travelling from one to another", and these are usually not accounted for by the funding they receive.

Projectisation of funding and prioritisation of quick impact funding also places local organisations in precarious situations. CSOs are often lacking the institutional funding needed to retain high capacity staff, pay rent and maintain management systems. Where organisations were able to meet these needs, they reported feeling more sustainable and effective in their work. A CSO coordinator from

Beni, North Kivu elucidated the factors that have led to and maintained successful work:

"the commitment of our staff, the respect of the principles of protection …. The necessary factor for this success is: funding, because without funding we would not be able to support the field investigators with the communication costs for the alerts, we would not be able to pay the salaries of our staff."

Interviewees also cited short-term projects and funding as a major impediment to their work, because effective atrocity prevention work requires long-term, sustained action. Interviewees noted occasions when work was abandoned when funds ran out. For instance, a Programmes Manager of a CSO in Goma, North Kivu lamented that they had to cease running several initiatives such as working:

"with vulnerable women against child marriage, but faced a funding problem. [the local organisation] also supported a local youth centre…, which provided skills training to youth. This was shut down due to a lack of funds. They also supported a secondary school that was focused on educating youth ex-combatants. The school is no longer functioning due to a lack of funds."

This was cited as a normal occurrence for local organisations in the eastern DRC context.

Many actors also cited a lack of direct funding as a major challenge to local civil society and noted that there are significant risks that stem from CSOs having to operate in line with external actors' interests and project designs. For instance, when international actors carry out work themselves or hire local implementing partners to carry out pre-designed programmes, they tend to overlook important conflict dynamics that are more easily discerned by local actors, thus risking exacerbating conflict.

In some cases, INGOs may unintentionally end up supporting "briefcase CSOs", or worse, inadvertently providing money to armed groups. One anonymous respondent observed that:

"grant-making is essentially against local civil society, and INGOs do not provide enough flexibility to local CSOs. When funds are disbursed in certain communities, it adds to the frustrations of other communities who are not told why that town is being prioritised. More generally, there is a disconnect between the development sector and the political context in eastern DRC. Development actors who come with benign intentions fail to recognise that they are political actors in the context, and can contribute to some of the problems laid out above. There are also many vested interests among other political actors to see development actors fail."

Direct funding for civil society may offer ways to side-step the use of third parties who have limited understanding of local conflict dynamics and may better support the development of sustainable local atrocity prevention systems. Local organisations asserted the need for direct, less restrictive and longer-term funding allowing them more flexibility in their work and helping them cover the costs that arise from collaborating.

However, direct funding is not without its own risks. More work should be done to understand how to provide direct funding to civil society in ways that do not create additional competition, and instead facilitates collaboration and coordination, between local actors as well as vertical relationships with national systems.

5. Challenging current conceptions on identity-based violence and atrocity prevention

One element of this research has involved forming a better understanding of the role of identity in atrocities and how the concept of atrocities was experienced by local actors. To do so, interviewees were asked to discuss the concepts and explain their experiences. Their responses highlighted how a lack of consensus regarding the definitions of key terms might be inadvertently damaging local atrocity prevention work.

5.1 Local framing of identity-based violence

Many interviewees provided their own definitions of identity-based violence, which included references to any form of violence against various identity groups (women, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual identity, age), from small to large scale violence. However, other interviewees were unable to provide a definition. A number of interviewees also rejected the concept of IBV, stating that the concept tends to be externally imposed, leading to an inaccurate framing of the violence in DRC that fails to capture the main issues impacting populations, primarily related to land tenure and absent justice systems. For example, the Director of a local organisation in Beni, North Kivu stated:

"we cannot talk about identity violence here at home, but rather about self-defence, because here we defend ourselves because others want our land. This is not to be confused with IBV."

Echoing this sentiment, many interviewees argued that speaking about conflict and violence in the DRC through a lens of identity per se is not an accurate portrayal of the phenomenon, and that attention should instead be paid to the underlying issues of land and governance that make 'identity' a useful tool for achieving political outcomes. Specifically, interviewees argued that IBV is employed as a tool for actors who wish to gain political or resource-based power. For instance, an academic from Beni, North Kivu noted that:

"politicians who lack positioning fall back on their identities in order to stir up conflicts...The political parties use identity to take root, to have a base..."

However, the use of identity to mobilise perpetrators was also called into question as interviewees argued that who is supposedly included in an 'identity-based armed group' is in reality extremely fluid. For instance, the ethnic composition of militias or of 'warring parties' changes from one week to the next, depending on the incentives of the perpetrator(s) or on the type of issues being contested. Identity was only employed when there was a strategic use for achieving a specific outcome.

Interviewees argued that armed groups are very rarely homogenous and often stressed the need for those studying and working on the conflicts in DRC to better understand why groups are fighting, what structural issues facilitate violence, and why identity may or may not be salient in a particular bout of violence. This point was elucidated by a foreign government actor who expressed that:

"identities can be malleable and shift over time in conflict, which can lead to internal divides within a given community. In certain Mai-Mai groups created from ethnic groups, identity markers that underpinned the group become marginal and they are more interested in gaining access to resources and power."

The use of identity to target groups was expressed as one form of violence amongst many, including the more frequent experiences of indiscriminate attacks on civilians; small-scale fighting within communities; or between members of neighbouring communities (most frequently tied to contestations over land use).

For some interviewees the use of term 'identity' itself has historically served to conflate the complex relationships between identity and

sources of political or economic power (such as land ownership or access) as causes of conflict with an oversimplified lens of 'ethnic conflict'. For instance, international reports of the DRC tend to overemphasise the role of identity in the violence (e.g. labelling these as 'ethnic conflicts') and underemphasise the role of localised politics. This is reflected in numerous news articles, donor reports, and policy discussions that tend to discuss the violence in eastern DRC as 'ethnic cleansing' or 'identity-based atrocities' but fail to provide any discussion around root causes such as insecure land tenure and the politicisation of identity by individuals and groups for political gains.[60]

In the context of eastern DRC, this may mean that externally funded atrocity prevention activities are superficially informed by a focus on identity (e.g. focusing on targeting perpetrators) rather than on more complex phenomena which give rise to the use of identity in violence. For instance, activities may neglect areas ripe for early prevention, such as working with communities around issues of land tenure before land issues arise.

Ensuring that atrocity and broader prevention activities proactively grapple with underlying political issues will therefore be a vital step towards sustainably reducing the underlying factors of atrocities and much of IBV. Furthermore, effective atrocity prevention activities or mechanisms must be grounded in an understanding of why identity might become strategically useful, and how identity factors become salient in localised conflicts. As such, tracking the salience and manipulation of identity in conflict events presents a particular opportunity for predicting atrocities in this context. Local actors do not appear to be tracking the salience of identity factors or the presence of IBV through existing EWER indicators.[61] This is therefore a core recommendation of this report.

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60 For example, the recent violence in Ituri is framed in the following sources from 2020, in which only one article briefly references root causes of the violence: https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethnic-violence-dr-congo-triggers-possible-crimes-against-humanity; https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/10/many-killed-in-ethnic-violence-in-eastern-dr-congo; https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/drc-inter-ethnic-violence-ituri-may-constitute-crimes-against
61 As shown in Table 5, Section 3.1

5.2 Local framing of atrocities and atrocity prevention

Similarly, interviewees' definitions of atrocities and "atrocity prevention" differed quite significantly from external definitions, particularly those underpinning global policy frameworks on atrocities.

Local actors tended to view atrocities as part and parcel of an environment experiencing complex forms of violence. Atrocity prevention activities were seen as largely indistinguishable from what they referred to as 'violence prevention', 'conflict prevention' and 'peacebuilding' work.

For example, "dialogue and relationship building" was one of the most commonly cited atrocity prevention activities, yet interviewees noted that this is a form of peacebuilding as well as an approach to general violence prevention. Atrocity prevention activities were only deemed as such when they were tied to specific funding from an external actor, which suggests that the distinctions between the different types of prevention agendas do not resonate with local realities.

This raises a question of how the definitions used by international actors to distinguish between different prevention agendas might impact funding approaches, and local practice as a result. While local civil society actors may conduct the same

activities across all forms of prevention, the funding they receive is often siloed under the framing some specific form of prevention. This means that opportunities for collaboration and coordinating across prevention agendas are reduced, particularly when CSOs and INGOs are pressured to work within a specific remit of a project.

This signals a need for atrocity prevention actors, particularly policy makers and funders, to revisit the current silos and assess the inherent value of maintaining a distinction between these fields for local prevention activities and funding. These distinctions appear to relate more to how international actors conceptualise violence reflected within global policy frameworks, rather than how violence is experienced and addressed in local contexts.

Echoing Bellamy's (2011) call for employing an 'atrocity prevention lens' within prevention agendas, it seems necessary that funders and policy makers revisit how distinctions between prevention agendas are applied in the contexts they support in order to fully address the linkages between conflict phenomena and complex or diverse forms of violence, including atrocities.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The eastern DRC's protracted conflict is deeply tied to the country's history of fragility. Absent governance, patrimonialism and active involvement in violence has undermined the ability of the Congolese government to protect its population from large-scale violence or prevent the proliferation of non-state armed actors. Low capacity of government actors and institutions, and limited state presence particularly in the eastern regions, has left a security vacuum where contestations of power frequently lead to violence and insecurity. The legacies of colonialism, regional tensions and international intervention have shaped conflict dynamics, notably the instrumentalization of identity for political and economic control. As a result, the eastern DRC continues to experience high levels of recurring violence and remains at high risk of atrocities, with serious implications on local communities.

In the absence of effective state-led protection, and in the context of a decreasing role and capacity of the UN peace operations mission, local actors have been shown to carry the burden of this work. Local actors carry out a variety of effective atrocity prevention activities that often overlap with conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. Notably, these include activities to:

Establish early warning and response mechanisms to anticipate the escalation of violent conflict and inform strategic responses to crises.

- Contribute to research, conflict analyses and mapping to explore conflict dynamics and prevention efforts and determine best approaches to mitigate conflict.

- Facilitate and engage in permanent dialogue groups and community structures such as local peace committees to maintain peaceful relations between groups and support conflict prevention efforts, including early warning work.

- Undertake awareness-raising and sensitisation on key violence prevention issues through community radios, field visits and community events.

- Support DDR programmes and activities targeting ex/combatants, at-risk youth, child soldiers and vulnerable women in order to reintegrate them into society.
- Provide alternative forms of justice, such as community 'Barazas' or 'peace courts' that offer peaceful dispute resolution options to community members.

Despite the leading role of civil society in current atrocity prevention efforts, local actors continue to emphasise that the DRC government has the primary responsibility for this work. However, conditions of state fragility continue to undermine the potential of the state to play this role. The misalignment of state and customary laws, particularly within justice and land tenure systems, has led to a context that is ripe for recurring political contestations that often erupt in violence. Alongside this, government complicity in violence, a lack of government presence throughout the country, and overall fragility has not only undermined the ability of state to protect civilians but has also undermined the ability of all actors to collaborate and coordinate their prevention efforts.

In order for the DRC government to gain legitimacy and effectively prevent violence within its borders, core issues of fragility must be addressed. This includes increasing capacity and support for state organisations (such as security forces and local, regional and national political officers), consolidating and promulgating state institutions (such as justice and land tenure systems), and ensuring public servants and security actors are held to account for complicity in conflict dynamics and violence.

It is important to note that addressing issues of state fragility must be approached with sensitivity – addressing fragility may increase particular vulnerabilities to atrocities given the power relations underpinning the DRC government, economy and society. If power relations are not considered (e.g. how land reform might disrupt balances of power between local groups or individuals), power holders may resort to violence to ensure they retain their preferable position. In this context, perhaps the most vital step towards preventing atrocities lies in the ability of prevention actors to effectively identify, understand and address these underlying factors.

In the interim however, addressing issues of state fragility must go hand in hand with substantial support for existing successful local atrocity prevention efforts. Effective support for atrocity prevention should prioritise efforts that lead to: 1) better coordination (including consistency of types and use of indicators across groups); collaboration between all levels of atrocity prevention actors; coordination mechanisms used, which are accessible to all actors, and 2) better resourcing (primarily for local actors in terms of capacity building, longer term/institutional funding, while moving away from aid projectisation).

Atrocity prevention actors (and violence prevention actors more broadly) can take steps to ensure current activities are better informed, for example, through establishing common indicators within EWER systems to track the salience of identity and land issues that may develop into violence and atrocities. These types of actions will support the development of more effective, consistent and robust prevention mechanisms, which will ideally support the functioning of a national mechanism.

Furthermore, by convening frequent and inclusive dialogue activities with state actors, civil society, security actors, local communities, etc., trust can be fostered between key actors. This will facilitate stronger vertical and horizontal relationships, thus improving opportunities for stronger coordination and collaboration.

As MONUSCO prepares to withdraw from certain provinces, it is also essential that a strong transition plan is developed and implemented in collaboration with the Congolese government, state security actors and civil society. This process should focus on a handover of resources and infrastructure to support the autonomy of local and national atrocity prevention efforts, as well as strengthening relationships between these actors.

Finally, the existence of silos between various prevention agendas (peacebuilding, conflict prevention, violence prevention and atrocity prevention) highlights the need to revisit core assumptions within the prevention field. Narratives determined at the policy level and the use of framings such as IBV and 'mass atrocities' for addressing complex violence are not always reflective of local realities. However, these framings have direct effects on approaches to funding, which may inadvertently undermine the effectiveness of violence prevention efforts more broadly. Any national, regional or local mechanism for atrocity prevention should be carefully embedded within a broader violence prevention framework to ensure that the work does not become siloed and to create opportunities for the interventions emanating from these different agendas to be synergistic and mutually reinforcing.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, there are a number of pertinent recommendations for the Congolese Government, MONUSCO, local civil society, and international donors:

DRC Government

The capacity deficits of the current DRC government, both in terms of its organisations and institutions, has ultimately facilitated an environment at grave risk for atrocities. Consistent with the majority of research on the DRC, this report notes the urgent need for the Congolese government to take immediate steps to: improve the capacity of state actors and institutions[62], reduce government complicity in violence and crimes, and promulgate consistent laws regarding land tenure, human rights and impunity.

Specifically, this research finds the most effective step the government can take to support current atrocity prevention efforts is to **build linkages locally and regionally to resource and facilitate the sustainable implementation of the DRC's National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination.** Recognising the financial constraints and legitimate competing pressures on the DRC government's current resources, we have identified several approaches for both national and provincial government to undertake in collaboration with international partners and civil society:

National government

1. Strengthen the DRC National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination by developing:

   a. Vertical channels for communication, connection, and provision of technical and policy support to sub-national atrocity prevention bodies to ensure that local and provincial issues are translated to national policy makers and back to provincial level;

   b. Horizontal communications channels so that provincial atrocity prevention bodies can dialogue, exchange information, and share good practices across the provinces and regions.

2. Allocate financial, material and human resource support to local governmental bodies and local civil society organisations to facilitate long-term dialogue activities between all relevant conflict actors (e.g. security actors, community members, civil society, private sector and local government);

3. Proactively engage with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to strengthen regional relationships to learn about successful practices for strengthening state-society relations via a national prevention mechanism, for instance by collaborating with foreign bodies such as Tanzania's National Committee on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and all Forms of Discrimination.

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62   Improving capacity of state actors should prioritise the resourcing of security forces (PNC and FARDC), including ensuring reliable salaries and sufficient equipment for carrying out their duties, such as adequate transportation and reliable telecommunications infrastructure.

Local and provincial government

4. Allocate financial, material and human resource support to facilitate the creation of formal local and provincial prevention mechanisms to strengthen the foundations of the national prevention mechanism and ensure consistent and coordinated practice across all actors.

MONUSCO

While MONUSCO needs to take steps to address long-standing issues that have undermined their ability to collaborate effectively with civil society, such as issues of low accountability and a lack of flexibility in their approaches, the imminent withdrawal of MONUSCO from several provinces in DRC highlights a number of vital actions in need of immediate implementation.[63] First and foremost, **MONUSCO should develop and implement a robust and comprehensive transition strategy that specifically includes plans for enhancing the capacities and agency of civil society to contribute to their own protection, violence prevention, and peacebuilding**. This includes the following:

5. A detailed plan to support the functioning of the DRC's National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination, including direct actions to support links between civil society and DRC government actors such as the national government, the FARDC and the PNC;

6. A clear mandate for how Civil Affairs Chiefs and Heads of Office (JHRO) should coordinate with local civil society and local government to ensure systems, knowledge and resources are transferred to relevant actors who will take on the majority of atrocity prevention work after the UN's exit. This should include the hosting of exchange/dialogue forums to work with civil society and government actors to identify needs, risks and opportunities.

Civil society

Civil society currently functions as the primary provider of atrocity prevention and broader violence prevention work; thus, it is **essential that civil society actors support the Congolese government to address the root causes of atrocities, develop and fortify prevention networks both vertically and horizontally, and consolidate prevention practices and efforts.** This should involve the following actions:

7. Facilitate the development and implementation of local and provincial prevention mechanisms that provide standardised mechanisms for tracking predicting and preventing violence and atrocities. This should include integrating new indicators within existing early warning systems that can better predict violence and facilitate response, including indicators specifically on:

a. **Identity factors** that may indicate increased targeting of particular groups (e.g. gender and ethnicity);

b. **Land issues** (land tenure disputes, land reform implementation, etc.) that might pinpoint when particular groups are at risk of being targeted based on their relationship with land;

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63   Significant financial and human resource support from member states will be an essential part of ensuring these actions are both timely and successful.

c. **Behaviour and perception of public officials and security actors**, including tracking when actors fail to reinforce state justice and land tenure systems, in order to hold state actors to account for complicity in violence and identify when potential grievances may arise between state actors and communities.

8. Host recurring dialogue activities and partner with key actors (local and provincial government, PNC, FARDC, private sector and international actors) to support the (re)building of trust between state actors and society;

9. Advocate for the Congolese government, regional power holders and international actors to provide technical and financial support for local prevention efforts, revisit and amend existing silos in prevention work, and conduct further research to better understand the micro-dynamics of conflict in the DRC.

International donors

To enable and support the Congolese government, MONUSCO and civil society actors to achieve the above, international donors should prioritise the following actions:

10. Provide significantly increased financial and human resource support to the MONUSCO mission to facilitate a smooth transition over the next 3+ years;

11. Provide financial and technical support for local actors (civil society and local authorities) to establish local and provincial atrocity prevention mechanisms, including direct funding for recurring, locally led dialogue events to facilitate vertical and horizontal trust building between domestic actors;

12. Provide financial and technical support to local and provincial state actors to establish clarity around the application of land tenure laws; better establish the rule of law and systems of justice;

13. Support local atrocity prevention actors to set their own strategic direction, priorities and programmatic focus through the provision of **flexible and long-term funding** (directly or indirectly through local intermediaries);

14. Invest in evidence-based strategic actions that are grounded in locally led research on:

    a. the relationship between atrocities and complex violence/conflict (including interrogating existing silos between peacebuilding, conflict prevention, violence prevention and atrocity prevention)

    b. land conflicts, power relations and politics underpinning the conditions that lead to atrocities.

15. Be conscious and conflict-sensitive to terminology like 'atrocity prevention' and 'identity-based violence' and be guided by local actors' analyses, insights, and formulation of appropriate responses to ensure prevention work is not siloed and does not undermine broader strategic efforts at violence prevention.

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This report is part of a project that aims to ensure that local civil society can provide strategic, coordinated and sustainable atrocity prevention work in eastern DRC and Burundi.

It presents the key findings on the challenges facing atrocity prevention work, current activities, and success factors. It also presents recommendations to support atrocity prevention efforts for the Congolese Government, MONUSCO, local civil society, and international donors.

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